

AN
ESSAY
UPON THE
CIVIL WARS
OF
FRANCE,

Extracted from
CURIOUS MANUSCRIPTS.

And also upon the
EPICK POETRY
OF THE
EUROPEAN NATIONS,
From HOMER down to MILTON.

By MR. DE VOLTAIRE,
Author of the HENRIADE.

The Fourth Edition, Corrected.

To which is now prefixed,
A DISCOURSE ON TRAGEDY,
With REFLECTIONS on the *English*
and *French* DRAMA.
By the same AUTHOR.

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ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

READER.

I*T has the Appearance of too great
a Presumption in a Traveller,
who hath been but eighteen Months
in England, to attempt to write in a
Language which he cannot pronounce
at all, and which he hardly understands
in Conversation. But I have done
what we do every day at School, where
we write Latin and Greek, tho' surely*

we pronounce them both very pitifully ; and should understand neither of them, if they were uttered to us with the right Roman, or Greek Pronunciation.

I look upon the English Language as a learned one, which deserves to be the Object of our Application in France, as the French Tongue is thought a kind of Accomplishment in England.

Besides, I did not learn English for my private Satisfaction and Improvement only, but out of a kind of Duty.

I am ordered to give an Account of my Journey into England. Such an Undertaking can no more be attempted without understanding the Language, than a Scheme of Astronomy could be laid without the help of Mathematicks. And I have not a mind to imitate the late Mr. Sorbierès, who
having

having staid three Months in this Country, without knowing any thing, either of its Manners, or of its Language, thought fit to print a Relation which proved but a dull, scurrilous Satire, upon a Nation he knew nothing of.

Our European Travellers, for the most part, are satirical upon their neighbouring Countries, and bestow large Praises upon the Persians and Chinese; it being too natural to revile those who stand in Competition with us; and to extol those, who being far remote from us, are out of the reach of Envy.

The true Aim of a Relation is to instruct Men, not to gratify their Malice. We should be busied chiefly in giving faithful Accounts of all the useful Things, and of the extraordinary Persons; whom to know, and to imitate, would be a Benefit to our Countrymen.

trymen. *A Traveller who writes in that Spirit, is a Merchant of a nobler kind, who imports into his native Country the Arts and Virtues of other Nations.*

I will leave to others the Care of describing with accuracy, Paul's Church, the Monument, Westminster, Stonehenge, &c. I consider England in another View; it strikes my Eyes, as it is the Land which hath produced a Newton, a Locke, a Tillotson, a Milton, a Boyle; and many great Men, either dead or alive, whose Glory in War, in State-Affairs, or in Letters, will not be confined to the Bounds of this Island.

Whosoever had the Honour and the Happiness to be acquainted with any of them, and will do me the favour to let me know some notable (tho' perhaps not enough known) Passages of their

their Lives, will confer an Obligation, not only upon me, but upon the Publick.

Likewise, if there are any new Inventions or Undertakings, which have obtained or deserved Success, I shall be obliged to those who will be so kind as to give me any Informations of that nature : And shall either quote my Authors, or observe a religious Silence, according as they think it proper.

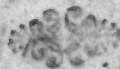
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1711
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Britannicus.



DISCOURSE

ON

TRAGEDY,

To the Right Honourable the
Lord Viscount BOLINGBROKE.

MY LORD,

WHEN I dedicate to an *English* Nobleman a dramatic piece represented at *Paris*, 'tis not but there are judicious critics, and shining genius's in my own country, to whom I might have inscrib'd it; but your Lordship knows that the Tragedy of *Brutus* was struck out in *Great Britain*. You may remember that whilst I was in *Wandsworth* with my excellent friend Mr. *Faulkener*, I amused myself with writing the first act of the following Tragedy in *English* prose,

* A

which

which I have since work'd up in *French* verse, with little alteration. I us'd to mention it to you sometimes, and we both wonder'd that no *English* poet had yet attempted to raise a Tragedy upon this subject, which, of all others, is perhaps the best adapted to the *English* stage. Your Lordship prompted me to finish a dramatic piece susceptible of such exalted sentiments.

Permit me therefore to present you with *Brutus*, though written in *French*; to your Lordship, *docte sermones utriusque linguae*, who is no less capable of instructing me in that language than in your own; to you who could teach me to give that force and energy to my own tongue, which a noble liberty of thinking inspires: for manly and vigorous thoughts always display themselves in words; and he who has a generous, and strong way of thinking, expresses himself in language suitable to it.

I will own to your Lordship, that at my return from *England*, where I had closely studied the *English* language for two years together, 'twas with some diffidence that I attempted to write a Tragedy in *French*. I had almost accustomed myself to think in *English*, and I found that the expressions of my own tongue were not now so familiar to me; 'twas like a river, whose course having been diverted, both time and pains were required to bring it back to its own bed; and 'twas then I found, that to attain an art in any perfection a man must devote his whole life to it.

What

What startled me chiefly at my return to this pursuit, was the severity of our poetry, and the slavery of rhyme. I regretted the happy liberty the *English* enjoy, of writing Tragedy in blank verse; of lengthening, and particularly curtailing most of their words; of running one verse into another; of coining, whenever it may be found necessary, new terms, which are always received as current, when they are sonorous, intelligible and necessary. An *English* poet, says I, is free, and can make his language subservient to his genius; whereas a *French* poet is a slave to rhyme, and is obliged to employ four lines to cloath a thought, when an *English* poet can express it in a single verse. The *English* writer paints whatever idea he pleases in words; the *French* writer such only as his tongue will bear. The one has a vast field to run in, the other walks in shackles through a narrow and slippery way.

*Of rhyme,
and the dis-
culties of
the French
versifica-
tion.*

But notwithstanding these reflections, and the many complaints which have been made on this head, it yet will be impossible for us ever to free ourselves from the captivity of rhyme, it being so essential to *French* poetry. Our language is abhorrent of inversions, and our verses must not run into one another; our syllables cannot produce a sensible harmony by long or short measures; our cesures, and a certain number of feet, would not sufficiently distinguish prose from verse: rhyme is therefore necessary to *French* versification.

Besides, the many great poets who have writ in rhyme, such as *Corneille*, *Racine*, and *Boileau*, have so accustomed our ears to this kind of harmony, that any other would be vastly grating; and I again repeat it, a poet who should attempt to shake off a yoke to which the great *Corneille* submitted, would justly be considered, not as a bold genius that was striking out a new road, but a very poor one, that is unable to tread the old path.

*Tragedies
in prose.*

Some writers have attempted to give us Tragedies in prose; but, in my opinion, this will never succeed. He that enjoys an art in perfection, will never be satisfied with an imperfect degree of it; and whoever should say to the public, I'm preparing something for you that will lessen your pleasure, would be unfavourably received. Were a Designer to hang up his sketches in the midst of several finished pieces of *Rubens*, or *Paul Veronese*, would it not be ridiculous in him, to compare his performances to the pictures of those great masters? 'Tis usual to heighten festivals with dances and songs; but would it be sufficient barely to use walking and speaking, upon pretence that both of them should be performed with grace and propriety, and that this would be more easy and natural?

'Tis highly probable, that poets will always be obliged to write Tragedy in verse, and that ours will especially be obliged to work up theirs in rhyme. 'Tis even to these restraints with regard to rhyme, and the extreme severity of our versification,

cation, that we owe those excellent poetical productions which are found in our language.

'Tis an everlasting rule with us, that a *Thought* must never be introduced merely for the sake of rhyme; that it must not be either trifling, or far-fetch'd; we require the same purity, the same exactness in poetical numbers as in prose; we don't allow the least licence; a writer with us must wear these chains continually, and at the same time appear free and disengag'd; and we look upon those as poets only, who submit to all these laws.

Hence 'tis easier to write a hundred verses in any language, than four in *French*. *L'Abbé Regnier Desmarets*, who was a member of the *French Academy*, and that of *la Crusca*, is a famous instance of the truth of what is here asserted. He translated *Anacreon* into *Italian* with success; but his poetical compositions in *French* are, if we except about a dozen of his verses, low and prosaic. *Menage* may be mentioned on this occasion; and how many of our poets have writ beautiful verses in *Latin*, and very flat ones in their own tongue?

*Examples
of the diffi-
culty of the
French versifi-
cation.*

I have not forgot how many disputes I had in *England* about our versification; and the objections which the learned Bishop *Atterbury* frequently makes to me, with regard to that childish restraint, as he calls it, which we so unnecessarily lay ourselves under. But I must beg your Lordship to believe, that the better a foreigner becomes acquainted with our tongue, the more he will be reconciled to our rhyme, tho' it disgusts him so

*The French
are pleas'd
with rhyme
in Comedy.*

much at first. Rhime is not only necessary to our Tragedies, but is even an embellishment to our comic pieces. A fine or smart saying, is retain'd more easily when work'd up in verse, than when barely told in prose; the characters which are drawn of human life, will always strike more forcibly in the former than in the latter; and whenever we mention *French* verse, rhyme is always understood. In a word, our poets have been forc'd to work up into verse, all those Comedies which the celebrated *Moliere* writ in prose; and they are always represented thus alter'd on the stage.

*Character of
the Eng-
lish Stage.*

Tho' I did not dare to introduce blank verse after the manner of the *English* and *Italians*, upon our stage; I yet should have been glad to transplant certain beauties of the *English* drama, into that of the *French*. It must be confess'd, that the *English* stage is vastly defective; and your Lordship has told me, your nation cou'd not boast one good tragedy: but to recompense this, we meet with wonderful scenes in these monstrous plays. Most of your tragic writers have fallen short of the purity, the regularity, those delicacies of action and style, the elegance, and all those *finesses* of art, which have established the reputation of the *French* stage since the age of the great *Corneille*. But your most irregular plays boast one considerable beauty, I mean that of action.

Some of our celebrated *French* tragedies, are rather so many dialogues, than the representation of an event. An *Italian* author, in a letter which he wrote

wrote to me on the stage, says as follows: *A critic of our Pastor Fido says, that that piece is a contexture of beautiful madrigals: and my opinion is, that were he now living, he would conclude that the French tragedies are a contexture of fine elegies, and pompous epithalamiums.*

I am afraid that the reflection of this *Italian* is too well grounded. Our excessive delicacy forces us sometimes to describe in words, what we would rather represent upon the stage under sensible images. We are afraid to venture the exhibiting new scenes, before a nation whose practice is to burlesque every thing that is writ out of the common way.

The place in which plays are acted, and the abuses which are crept into it, are also a cause of that dryness which may be objected to some of our dramatic pieces. The benches set on the stage for the spectators, contract the space of it, and make it almost impossible to represent the whole action. To this defect 'tis owing, that the scenes and decorations which are so strongly recommended by the antients, so seldom suit with the play. Above all, it hinders the actors from passing out of one room into another before the spectators, as was the judicious practice of the *Greeks and Romans*, in order to preserve at one and the same time the unity of place and probability.

How could we attempt, for instance, to bring *Pompey's ghost*, or the genius of *Brutus*, on our stage, among so many young people, who

*Defects of
the French
stage.*

*Example
drawn from
Mr. Addison's
Cato.*

view the most serious incidents, purely that it may give them an opportunity of saying some smart thing? How cou'd we bring in the midst of these, the body of *Marcus* to *Cato* his father, who makes the following speech?

" *Welcome my son, here lay him down, my friends,*
 " *Full in my sight, that I may view at leisure*
 " *The bloody carse, and count those glorious wounds.*
 " *How beautiful is death, when earn'd by virtue!*
 " *Who would not be that youth? what pity is it*
 " *That we can die but once to serve our country!*

— — — — —
 " *Alas! my friends!*
 " *Why mourn you thus? let not a private loss*
 " *Afflict your hearts! 'Tis Rome requires our tears,*
 " *The mistress of the world — — —*
 — — — — — " *Rome is no more,*
 " *O liberty! O virtue! O my country! &c.*

Cato, last scene of Act IV.

This is what Mr. *Addison* did not scruple to bring before an *English* audience; this is what was translated into *Italian*, and play'd in several cities of *Italy*. But were we to exhibit such a scene in *Paris*, wou'd not the pit immediately censure it, and the ladies turn away their faces with an air of distaste?

Your Lordship wou'd scarce believe how delicate the *French* are on this article. The writer of our tragedy of *Manlius*, borrowed the plot of it from

from that of *Otway*, entitled, *Venice Preserv'd*, Otway's Venice Preserv'd, and De la Fosse's Manlius compar'd. &c. The subject is taken from the history of the marquis *de Bedemar's* conspiracy, written by *L'Abbé de St. Real*; and give me leave to mention transiently, that the piece of history in question, equal perhaps to *Salust*, is vastly superiour to either of the dramatic pieces which have been raised from it.

First, your Lordship will observe, that prejudice forc'd the *French* poet to disguise a well-known incident under *Roman* names; whereas the *English* dramatic writer, introduc'd all his characters under their real ones. An *English* audience did not think it at all ridiculous to hear a *Spanish* ambassador call'd by the name of *Bedemar*; and conspirators, under the names of *Jaffier*, *Pierre*, and *Eliot*: this alone might have damn'd the play in *France*.

But farther, *Otway* is not afraid to assemble all the conspirators. *Renault* swears them all, assigns each man his post, names the hour of slaughter, and looks every now and then with a troubled and suspicious eye on *Jaffier*; and addresses to all of them these pathetic words, translated verbatim from *L'Abbé St. Real*.

Never did so profound Repose, fore-run
Calamity so great: Nay our good fortune
Has blinded the most piercing of mankind,
Strengthen'd the fearfullest, charm'd the most sus-
pectful,

Con-

*Confounded the most subtle : For we live,
We live my friends, and quickly shall our life
Prove fatal to these tyrants, &c.*

Venice preserv'd. Act III. last Scene.

Jamais repos si profond ne précéda un trouble si grand. Notre bonne destinée a aveuglé les plus clairs-voyans de tous les hommes, rassuré les plus timides, endormi les plus soupçonneux, confondu les plus subtils : nous vivons encore, mes chers amis, — nous vivons, & notre vie sera bientôt funeste aux tyrans de ces lieux, &c.

Now how did the *French* author conduct himself on this occasion ? He was afraid of bringing so many characters on the stage, and contents himself with making *Renault*, under the name of *Rutile*, relate the most unpathetic part of the speech above-mention'd, which, he says, he made to the conspirators. Does not your Lordship perceive by this single circumstance, that this scene in *Orway* is infinitely superiour to that in *de la Fosse*, tho' the Tragedy of the former were ever so monstrous.

With what pleasure have I set to see *Shakespear's Julius Cæsar* acted ; a Tragedy, which for an hundred and fifty years, has been the delight of an *English* audience ? I don't indeed pretend to approve of the Gothic irregularities which are so glaring in every part of that play. 'Tis only astonishing there are not more in a dramatic piece, written in an age of ignorance, by a man who was even unacquainted with the Latin tongue, and guided only by his genius ; but in the midst of so many

*Critique of
Shake-
spear's Ju-
lius Cæsar.*

many egregious faults, how was I ravished to behold *Brutus* holding a dagger stain'd with *Cæsar's* blood, assemble the people of *Rome*, and harangue them thus from the *Rostra*!

Romans, countrymen, and friends! — If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of *Cæsar's*, to him I say, that *Brutus's* love to *Cæsar* was no less than his. If then that friend demand, why *Brutus* rose against *Cæsar*, this is my answer: Not that I lov'd *Cæsar* less, but that I lov'd *Rome* more. Had you rather *Cæsar* were living, and die all slaves; than that *Cæsar* were dead, to live all free-men? As *Cæsar* lov'd me, I weep for him; as he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honour him; but as he was ambitious, I slew him.

—— Who's here so base that would be a bond-man? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so rude, that would not be a Roman? If any, speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile, that will not love his country? If any, speak; for him have I offended.

All. None, *Brutus*, none.

Brutus. Then none have I offended — Here comes his body, mourn'd by *Mark Anthony*; who tho' he had no hand in his death, shall receive the benefit of his dying, a place in the common-wealth; as which of you shall not? With this I depart, that as I slew my best friend for the good of *Rome*, I have the same dagger for my self, when it shall please my country to need my death.

Confounded the most subtle: For we live,

All.

All. *Live, Brutus, live!*

Julius Cæsar. Act III. Scene V.

In the next scene, *Mark Anthony* endeavours to awake pity in the breasts of those very *Romans*, whom *Brutus* had inspir'd with rigour and cruelty. *Anthony*, by his artful discourse, works insensibly on their stubborn minds; and when he finds them soften'd, he then brings out *Cæsar's* dead body, when employing the most pathetic images, he stirs them up to rebellion and revenge.

Possibly the *French* could not bear to have a chorus, compos'd of *Roman* plebeians, brought upon their stage; to have *Cæsar's* bloody body brought upon it; or the populace spirited to revenge from the *Rostra*: 'tis the business of custom, which governs universally, to change the taste of a nation, and make the objects of our aversion delightful.

*Shocking
scenes in the
Greek
Drama.*

The *Greeks* have ventur'd to exhibit scenes equally shocking to us. *Hippolitus*, mangled by his fall, comes and counts his wounds, and makes dreadful moan. *Philoctetes*, in deep anguish, sinks down, and black blood gushes from his wound. *Oedipus* cover'd with the blood which still trickles from the sockets of his eyes he had just before pull'd out, exclaims against the Gods, and men. The cries of *Clitemnestra* are heard, whom her own son is murdering; and *Electra* cries out upon the stage; *Strike, spare her not; she did not spare our father.* *Prometheus* is fix'd to a rock with nails, which are struck into his breast and arms. The *Furies* answer

Clitem-

Clitemnestra's bloody ghost in inarticulate howlings. In a word, several *Greek* Tragedies are full of this extravagant terror.

I know that the *Greek* tragic-writers, superiour certainly to the *Englisb*, frequently mistook horror for terror; and the shocking and incredible, for the tragical and marvellous. Tragedy was in its infancy at *Athens* in *Æschylus's* time, as in *London* in that of *Shakespear*; but among the great faults of the *Greek* tragic-writers, and even yours, we meet with a true *Pathos*, and uncommon beauties: and if some *Frenchmen*, who are acquainted with foreign Tragedies and manners, only by translation and hear-say, condemn them without the least restriction; they, methinks, may be compared to a blind man, who should assert, that a rose cannot boast any lively colours, because he felt several prickles about it.

But if the *Greeks* and *Englisb* overleap the bounds of decorum; and particularly if the latter, instead of representing objects of terror, exhibit such as are frightful and shocking; the *French*, on the other side, are as timid and scrupulous as the *Englisb* have been rash: we are too calm, for fear of being too violent; and sometimes come short of Tragedy, from our apprehensions of passing the bounds of it.

Far be it from my thoughts to turn the stage into a field of blood, as *Shakespear* has done, and his successors, who wanting his genius, have imitated his errors only. But I cannot but think, that there
are

are certain scenes, which, tho' they now appear shocking and hideous to the *French*, would yet, were they finely work'd up, artfully exhibited, and above all softned by the seducing charm of beautiful numbers, afford us a kind of pleasure we as yet are strangers to.

*Il n'est point de serpent ni de monstre odieux,
Qui par l'art imité ne puisse plaire aux yeux.*

English'd.

*A hideous monster, tho' it shocks the sight,
May, when well painted, give extreme delight.*

At least, give me leave to ask, why our theatrical heroes and heroines are allow'd to lay violent hands on themselves, and at the same time are forbid to kill any person beside? Is the stage less bloody when *Atalida* stabs her self for her lover, than when *Cesar* murders himself? And if the sight of *Cato's* son, whose dead body is brought to his father, gives that excellent *Roman* an opportunity of making an admirable speech; if that scene has been applauded by the greatest sticklers for the *French* decorum; if it has not disgusted women of the most delicate taste, why shou'd not the *French* accustom themselves to such scenes? Is not nature the same in all men?

All these laws of not shedding blood upon the stage, of never making more than three persons speak, &c. might, methinks, be received with some limitations

limitations by us, as formerly by the *Greeks*. The *Decorums and dramatic unities*, laws of decorum are not altogether so strict as those fundamental ones of the drama; the unities of time, place and action. 'T would denote a weakness, as well as a barrenness of invention, to extend an action beyond the bounds of time and place suitable to it. Ask a poet who has crowded too many incidents in his play, why he fell into that error; in case he speaks frankly, he'll confess that he had not genius sufficient to raise it from one single incident; and if he lays the scene of action in two different cities, and makes the time of it two days, be persuaded that he had not art to contract it within the space of three hours, and in the walls of a palace, as probability would require.

But the case would be very different with regard to a poet who should venture to exhibit dreadful objects on the stage; such a one would not clash with probability: and this boldness, so far from supposing a weakness in the writer, would, on the contrary, require a great genius, to infuse, as it were, by his verse, true grandeur into an action, which, were it not treated with a sublimity of expression, would be cruel and shocking.

This is what our great *Corneille* once attempted in his *Rodogune*. He brings a queen upon the stage, *Fifth act of Rodogune.* who, in presence of her whole court, and an ambassador, is for poisoning her son and her daughter-in-law, having before killed her other son with her own hand. She presents them the venom'd cup, and, upon their refusal and suspicions, she

she herself drinks it off, and by that means dies of the poison she had prepared for them.

Such dreadful catastrophes must not be often represented on the stage, and 'tis not every tragic writer can pretend to hazard them. New scenes like these must be work'd up with great caution, and require a masterly hand. The *English* themselves confess that *Shakespear* only could call up ghosts with success, and give speech to them:

*For Shakespear's magic could not copy'd be,
Within that circle none durst walk but he.*

*True pomp
and shew in
Tragedy.*

The more a theatrical action is majestic or dreadful, the more insipid it would be, were it frequently repeated; much the same as battles, which being vastly terrible in themselves, become flat and languid if they are frequently described in history.

The only shewy play of *Racine* is *Athalie*, his master-piece. Here a child is seen seated on a throne, with the priest and his nurse standing round it; a queen who commands her soldiers to murder him, and arm'd Levites running to defend him. The whole action is pathetic, but were not the style equally so, 'twould be trifling and childish.

The more a dramatic writer would strike the eye with pomp and shew, the more he is obliged to put exalted sentiments into the mouth of his characters; otherwise he would be but a mere *Scenist*, if I may be allowed the expression, and not a tragic poet. About thirty years ago the
Tragedy

Tragedy of *Montezuma* was acted in *Paris*. The play open'd with a new scene, representing a palace, in a grand, but barbarous taste; *Montezuma* appeared in a very singular habit; at the farther end of the stage slaves were seen arm'd with bows and arrows; around him eight grandees of his court were fallen prostrate, with their faces to the ground; *Montezuma* began the Tragedy with the following words:

*Levez-vous, votre Roi vous permet aujourd'hui
Et de l'envifager, & de parler a lui.*

In English:

*Arise! to-day your monarch condescends
To let you view his face, and speak to him.*

The audience were vastly delighted with this whole scene, but the rest of the tragedy was flat and insipid.

With regard to my self, I must confess that 'twas with diffidence I introduc'd on the *French* stage, the senate of *Rome* in their scarlet robes, giving their votes. I call'd to mind that when I exhibited in *Oedipus* a chorus of *Thebans*, who spoke these words:

O mort, nous implorons ton funeste secours.

O mort, vien nous sauver, viens terminer nos jours.

In English:

O death! we now thy fatal aid invoke!

O save! and give us quick the friendly stroke.

* B

The

The audience, instead of being touch'd with the *Pathos* which may possibly be in these lines, were at first struck only with the folly, as 'twas pretended, of putting these words in the mouths of young actors, and thereupon burst out a laughing. 'Twas this prevented me in *Brutus* from making the senators speak when *Titus* is accused before them; and heightning the terror of that incident, by expressing the grief and astonishment of those fathers of the *Roman* people, who ought certainly to have discovered their surprize otherwise than by dumb-shew, though even that was omitted.

But if there are, my Lord, any tolerable scenes in the following Tragedy, I must confess I owe them to some friends, who have the same way of thinking with your Lordship. These advised me to soften *Brutus's* severity with paternal affection, in order that the audience might admire and pity the struggle he had with himself, when he sentences his son to die. They urg'd me to draw young *Tullia* tender and innocent, since that in case I had represented her as a haughty heroine, who had address'd herself to *Titus*, as a monarch to a subject, 'twould have lessened the character of *Titus*, and the embassador would have come to no purpose. They would have *Titus* appear under the character of a young man prey'd upon by wild passions, fond of *Rome* and his father; idolizing *Tullia*; thinking himself bound to adhere faithfully to the senate, at the same time that he was dissatisfy'd with their proceedings; and made to swerve from

*Advice of
an excellent
critic.*

from his duty, by a passion which he fancied he could easily triumph over.

And indeed, had *Titus* been of the same opinion with his mistress, and employed arguments with himself in favour of monarchy, *Brutus* must then have been considered as a ring-leader of rebels; *Titus* would not have felt the least remorse, nor would his father have excited pity.

Be sure, continued my friends, not to bring both the sons of *Brutus* upon the stage: you are sensible that affliction becomes fainter when divided; but above all, let your play be simple and uncomplex'd; imitate that beauty of the *Greek* drama: be persuaded that a multiplicity of incidents, and a complication with regard to what ought to touch and affect, is the refuge of an un-inventive genius, which cannot raise a play of five acts from a single passion. Work up every scene singly, as tho' it were the only one. To render a poem the admiration of posterity, the particular parts of it must be beautiful. 'Tis often the peculiar way of expressing the most trite things; the art of embellishing by diction, what mankind in general think and feel, that distinguishes the great poet. We neither meet with far-fetch'd thoughts, or romantic adventures in the fourth book of *Virgil's Æneid*; the whole is natural, which is the utmost effort of the human mind. The only reason why *Racine* shines so much above those tragic writers who have said the same things as he did, is because he express'd his thoughts more beautifully. *Corneille*

is never truly great, but when he cloaths his ideas in words suitable to them. Remember *Boileau's* precept:

*Et que tout ce qu'il dit facile à retenir,
De son ouvrage en vous laisse un long souvenir.*

In English:

*An author's thoughts, in easy language dress'd,
Will, on the memory, be deep impress'd.*

'Tis in this that so many of our theatrical pieces have been wanting, tho' the beauty of action, and the fine voice of the player, gained them great applause upon the stage. How many mean performances have been acted oftner than *Cinna*, or *Britannicus*? but then, no one has ever retained two lines of the former, whereas all *Britannicus* and *Cinna* are got by heart. In vain a few affecting circumstances in the *Regulus* of *Pradon* drew tears from the audience; that tragedy, and all contemptible pieces like it, are despised, notwithstanding the applause which the writers bestow so lavishly on themselves in their prefaces.

Of love.

Methinks your Lordship is going to ask me, how it were possible for such judicious critics to suffer me to introduce love-scenes in a tragedy, the subject whereof is *Junius Brutus*; and to intermix that passion with the severe virtue of the *Roman* senate, and the policy of an embassador?

Our dramatic writers are accused of having enervated the stage with too much tenderness; and your
poets

poets have deserved the same reproach for almost a century: for the *English* have always imitated, in some measure, our modes, and our vices. But will your Lordship give me leave to speak my opinion on this head:

To require love in all Tragedies, denotes, in my opinion, an effeminate taste; as to banish it absolutely, is the indication of a churlish and unreasonable temper.

Both Tragedy and Comedy are a lively picture of the passions of mankind; the ambition of a monarch is represented in Tragedy; and comedy ridicules the vanity of men in low stations: here you laugh at the coquetry and intrigues of a woman of no figure; there you bewail the unhappy passion of *Phædra*; in like manner love amuses you in a romance, and ravishes you in *Virgil's Dido*.

Love is not more essentially a fault in Tragedy, than in the *Æneid*; and we are not to censure it, except it be introduced unseasonably, or treated without art.

The *Greeks* rarely ventur'd to bring this passion on the *Athenian* stage. First, because as their Tragedies, in the beginning, were built on terrible subjects, the minds of the audience were form'd to such kind of objects. Secondly, because as women in those ages led a much more recluse life than those in ours; and therefore love was not then, as at present, the subject of all conversations; the poets were less invited to treat of a passion, which
of

of all others, is the most difficult to represent, because of the excessive delicacy it requires.

A third reason, which to me appears pretty strong, is their having no actresses; female characters being always represented by men with masks: and for these to have appear'd in a love-scene, would, methinks, have been very ridiculous.

* Celebrated
actresses in
Paris.

'Tis the very reverse in *London* and *Paris*; and it must be confess'd, that the writers for the stage would have plainly proved they were little acquainted with their own interest, and the taste of their audience; had they made an *Oldfield*, a * *Duclos*, or a *Lecouvreur*, appear on the stage only in ambitious or political characters.

The worst is, that love, in our theatrical heroes, is often no more than gallantry; and that in yours, it sometimes degenerates into leudness.

In our *Alcibiades*, a tragedy that run a long time, tho' but a mean performance, and therefore little esteem'd, the public admir'd for a long time the trifling verses following, which the *Esopus* of the last age used to pronounce with an insinuating tone of voice.

*Ah! lorsque pénétré d'un amour véritable,
Et gemissant aux pieds d'un objet adorable,
J'ai connu dans ses yeux timides ou distraits
Que mes soins de son cœur ont pu troubler la paix,
Que par l'aveu secret d'une ardeur mutuelle
La mienne a pris encore une force nouvelle,*

Dans

*Dans ces momens si doux j'ai cent fois éprouvé
Qu'un mortel peut goûter un bonheur achevé.*

English'd.

*Ah! when my heart inflam'd with real love,
And sighing at the feet of a dear object,
Her eyes which fearful glanc'd, or wildly stray'd,
Prov'd that my passion cou'd disturb her peace;
That by acknowledging a mutual flame
In secret, mine has burnt with greater violence;
In these enraptur'd moments I've experienc'd,
That mortals sometimes taste sublimest joys.*

In your *Venice preserv'd*, old *Renault* attempts to violate *Belvedera's* chastity, and she complains of it to her husband in no very decent terms; and among other particulars, tells him he came to her * *unbutton'd*.

In order to make love worthy of the tragic muse, it must be a necessary and essential part of the plot, and not be brought in at random, to fill up the void of your Tragedies and ours, which are all too long; it must be a passion truly tragical, consider'd as a weakness, and combated by remorse. Love must lead either to unhappiness and guilt, in order to point out the danger of that passion; or else virtue must triumph over it, to show that

* *No sooner was I lain on my sad bed,
But that vile wretch approach'd me; loose, unbutton'd,
Ready for violation* —————

Venice Preserv'd, Act III. Scene II.

that it is not invincible : without these qualities, 'tis merely a pastoral, or comic love.

Your Lordship is to pronounce, whether I have observ'd any of these rules ; but above all, I must beg your noble friends not to judge of the genius and taste of our nation from this discourse, and the Tragedy which I present to your Lordship. Possibly no writer in *France* cultivates the Muses with less success than my self; and if the sentiments which I here submit to your censure should be disapprov'd, I only am to be blam'd.

Before I conclude, I must observe to your Lordship, that among the great number of faults, with which the following Tragedy abounds, some expressions are not so correct, as the purity of our diction may require ; I am not so considerable a writer, as to be allow'd to deviate sometimes from the severe rules of *Grammar*. *Tullia* says somewhere,

*Rome & moi dans un jour ont vu changer leur sort.**

But to speak with propriety, it ought to have been :

Rome & moi dans un jour avons chang  de sort.

I have committed the same error in two or three other passages, which are much more than ought to be, in a piece that has so few beauties to compensate its defects.

I am, my LORD, &c.

* *One day has chang'd, the fate of Rome, and me,*

THE
HISTORY
OF THE
CIVIL WARS
OF
FRANCE,

Upon which the HENRIADE is
grounded.

ENRY the Great, King of *France*,
was born in the Year 1553, in *Pau*, a
small Town, the Capital of *Bearn* ;
his Father, *Anthony of Bourbon*, Duke
of *Vendome*, was of the Royal Blood,
and the Head of that Branch call'd *Bourbon*, which
formerly signify'd *Muddy*, from a Place so call'd,
which fell to their Family by a Marriage with an
Heiress of that Name.

The House of *Bourbon*, from *Lewis* the Ninth
down to *Henry* the Fourth, had been almost al-
ways neglected, and reduced to such a degree of
B Poverty,

Poverty, that the famous Prince of *Conde*, Brother to *Anthony* of *Navarre*, and Uncle to *Henry* the Great, had not six hundred Pounds a year of his own.

The Mother of *Henry* was *Jeanne d'Albret*, Daughter to *Henry d'Albret*, King of *Navarre*, a good Man, and a worthless Prince, rather slothful than peaceable; who bore with too much resignation the privation of his Kingdom, which had been taken from his Father by the *Pope's* Bull, supported by the Arms of *Spain*.

Jeanne, Daughter to so weak a Prince, had yet a weaker Husband, to whom she brought for a Portion, her little Principality of *Bearn*, and the empty Title of King of *Navarre*.

This Prince, who liv'd in a time of Factions and Civil Wars, which required a steady Mind, was always fickle and wavering in his Conduct; he never knew of what Party he was, nor of what Religion; neither fit for a Court, nor qualified to be a General: He spent all his Life in courting his Enemies, and in undoing his Servants; deceived by *Catharine* of *Medicis*, baffled and oppressed by the *Guises*, nay, cheated always by himself. He was mortally wounded at the Siege of *Rouen*, where he was fighting the Cause of his Enemies against the Interest of his own House; and he died, as he had liv'd, uncertain and anxious.

Jeanne d'Albret was quite of an opposite Temper, full of Courage and Resolution, feared by the Court of *France*, beloved by the Protestants, esteemed by both. She knew all the superior parts of Policy, but never the mean craft of Intrigue. It is very remarkable, that she turned Protestant at the very time her Husband turned Catholick; but from that day she was as firmly attached to her new Religion, as *Anthony* was wavering in his. By these means she became the Head of one Party, whilst her

her Husband was the Slave and Bubble of the other.

She took the Education of her Son entirely into her own hands. *Henry* was born with all the Endowments of his Mother, and he improv'd 'em eminently afterwards. He had nothing of his Father, except that easiness of Temper, which in *Anthony* was Uncertainty and Weakness, but proved in *Henry* Benevolence and Good-nature.

He was not brought up like a Prince, in that effeminate Pride which enervates the Body, weakens the Understanding, and hardens the Heart. His Food was coarse, his Clothes plain; he went always bare-headed, was sent to School with the young Companions of his Age, climbed up with them among Rocks and Woods to the tops of the neighbouring Mountains, according to the Custom of that Country, and of those Times.

While he was thus bred up with his Subjects in a sort of Equality, without which a Prince is too apt to forget he is born a Man; Fortune opened in *France* a bloody Scene, and through the Ruins of that Kingdom almost overturned, and over the Graves of many Princes untimely cut off, prepared him a Way to a Throne, which he was in time to conquer, and to restore to its Grandeur.

Henry the Second, King of *France*, the Head of the Branch of *Valois*, was killed at *Paris*, in a Tournament; which was the last in *Europe* of these romantick and dangerous Sports.

He left four Sons, *Francis* the Second, *Charles* the Ninth, *Henry* the Third, and the Duke of *Alençon*, all the unworthy Posterity of the great *Francis* the First; all (except *Alençon*) ascended the Throne one after another; all lived shamefully, died untimely, and without Issue.

The Reign of *Francis* the Second was short, but made famous by the first breaking out of those

Factions, and by the beginning of those Calamities, which laid waste the Kingdom of *France* thirty Years successively.

He was married to that famous and unfortunate *Mary Stuart*, whom her Beauty and Weakness led afterwards into great Faults, greater Miseries, and at last to a dreadful Death. She governed entirely her young Husband *Francis*, a Boy of Sixteen, without Vice, and without Virtue, born with an infirm Body, and a weak Mind.

Incapable of governing by her self, she was totally directed by the Duke of *Guise*, her Mother's Brother; he influenced the King by her means, and laid deep the Foundations of the Grandeur of his own House. *Catherine de Medicis*, the late King's Widow, and the present King's Mother, began now to shew the first Sparks of her Ambition, which had been stifled during the Life of her Husband: But being unable to prevail with her Son against a young Wife, whom he loved passionately, and against the powerful Credit of the House of *Guise*, she thought fit rather to be their Tool for a time, and to establish her own Authority by the help of their power, than to contend in vain against it.

Thus the *Guises* domineered over the King, and the two Queens; and being Masters of the Court, were by course Masters of the Kingdom; the one in *France* being generally a necessary Consequence of the other.

The House of *Bourbon* was groaning under the Oppression of the House of *Lorraine*; *Anthony* of *Navarre* bore patiently many scandalous Affronts; the Prince of *Conde*, his Brother, still more bitterly abused, endeavoured to shake off the Yoke. He united in his great Designs with the Admiral *Coligny*, the Head of the House of *Chatillon*: These two Men were the most terrible Enemies that the Court

Court had to fear; *Conde* more ambitious, more forward, more restless; *Coligny* of a more sedate Temper, stricter in his Behaviour, fitter to be the Head of a Party; indeed as unsuccessful in War as *Conde*, but repairing often by his Wisdom what seemed irreparable; more dangerous after a Defeat, than his Enemies after a Victory; endowed besides with as great a share of Virtue as those Times could permit, and as the Spirit of Faction could allow.

The Protestants began then to grow numerous, and to be conscious of their strength.

The Superstition, the dull ignorant Knavery of the Monks, the overgrown Power of *Rome*, Mens Passion for Novelty, the Ambition of *Luther* and *Calvin*, the Policy of many Princes; all these had given Rise and Countenance to this Sect, free indeed from Superstition, but running as headlong towards Anarchy as the Church of *Rome* towards Tyranny. The Protestants had been unmercifully persecuted in *France*; but it is the ordinary effect of Persecution to make Profelytes; their Sect increased every day amidst the Scaffolds and Tortures. *Conde*, *Coligny*, the two Brothers of *Coligny*, all their Adherents, all who were oppressed by the *Guises*, turned Protestants at once; they united their Grievs, their Vengeance, and their Interests together, so that a Revolution both in the State and in Religion was at hand.

The first Enterprize was a Plot to seize the *Guises* at *Amboise*, and to get the Person of the King into their hands. The Plot boldly contrived, secretly carried on, was discovered just as it was ready to be put in execution; the *Guises* punished the Conspirators in the most cruel manner, in order to terrify their Enemies from the like Attempts hereafter; more than seven hundred Protestants were executed. *Conde* was made Prisoner,

impeached of High Treason, tried, and sentenced to Death.

During his Trial, King *Anthony* of *Navarre*, his Brother, stirred up by his Wife, and by the *Colignys*, raised in *Guienne* a powerful Number of Gentlemen, as well Protestants as Catholicks, attached to his House : he went with this Army through *Gascogne* ; but upon a single Message that he received in his way, from the Court, he dismissed 'em all with Tears. *I must submit*, says he, *but I will obtain your Pardon from the King. Go, and ask Pardon for your self*, answered an old Officer, *our Security is in the Point of our Swords*. Whereupon the Nobility, who followed him, returned home with Scorn and Indignation. *Anthony* pursued his Journey to the Court, there he solicited for the Life of his Brother, being not secure of his own ; and he intreated every day the Duke, and the Cardinal of *Guise*, who received him sitting, with their Caps on, whilst he was bare-headed, and standing.

Every thing was now ready for the Death of the Prince of *Conde*, when on a sudden the King fell sick and died. The Circumstances, the Suddenness of this Accident, the propensity of Mankind to believe that the untimely Deaths of Princes are never natural, gave course to the general Opinion, that *Francis* the Second had been poisoned.

His Death gave a new turn to Affairs ; the Prince of *Conde* was set at liberty, his Party began to breathe, his Religion was propagated more and more, the Authority of the *Guises* declined, tho' not pulled down : *Anthony* of *Navarre* recovered a shadow of Authority, which was enough for him ; *Mary Stuart* was sent away into *Scotland* ; and *Catherine de Medicis*, who now began to act the first part on the Stage, was declared Regent of the Kingdom,

Kingdom, during the Minority of *Charles* the Ninth; her second Son.

She found herself intangled in a labyrinth of inextricable Difficulties, between two Religions, and several Factions struggling with each other, and contending for the Power.

She resolved to destroy them all, if she could, by their own Arms; she cultivated the Hatred of the *Condes* against the *Guises*; she promoted the Civil Wars, indifferent and impartial between the Church of *Rome* and that of *Geneva*, jealous only of her own Authority.

The *Guises*, who were zealous Catholicks, because *Conde* and *Coligny* were Protestants, were a long while at the Head of the Catholick Troops: Many Battles were fought, the Kingdom was laid waste by three or four Armies at a time.

The Constable, *Anne de Montmorency*, was killed at the Battle of *St. Denis*, in the Eightieth Year of his Age. *Francis* Duke de *Guise* was assassinated by *Poltrou*, at the Siege of *Orleans*. *Henry* the Third, then Duke of *Anjou*, a great Prince in his youth, tho' a mean King in his maturity, gained the Victories of *Jarnac* against *Conde*, and of *Moncontour* against *Coligny*.

The Behaviour of *Conde*, and his Death in the Battle of *Jarnac*, are too remarkable not to be mentioned. He had been wounded in his Arm two days before, and when he was just upon the point of engaging the Enemy, had the Misfortune to receive a kick from a vicious Horse of one of his Officers; his Leg was broken by the blow. The Prince, without expressing the least Concern, said to those who were about him; *Gentlemen, learn by this Accident, that prancing Horses are more dangerous than useful in a Day of Battle; let us go on, pursued he, the Prince of Conde, tho' with a broken Leg, and an Arm wound up, will engage with-*

out Fear, when followed by you. His Courage was not attended with Success, he lost the Battle, all his Army run away; his Horse being killed under him, he stood upright as well as he could, against a Tree, alone, fainting with the Smart of his Pain, but still undaunted, and his Face turned towards the Enemy. *Montesquiou*, Captain of the Guards to the Duke of *Anjou*, passed by the Place where the unfortunate Prince was standing: he asked, Who he was; and being told, 'twas the Prince of *Conde*, shot him dead in cold Blood.

After the Death of *Conde*, *Coligny* had upon him all the burthen of the Party. *Jeanne d'Albret*, then a Widow, committed her Son to his Care; the young *Henry*, at fourteen years of Age, went with him through all the Toils of War, and Hardship and Adversity were his Tutors.

His Mother and the Admiral had no other View, than to settle their Religion in *France* independant from the Church of *Rome*, and to secure their own Authority from the Power of *Catherine de Medicis*.

Catherine had got rid already of many of her Rivals; *Francis* Duke of *Guise*, who was the more dangerous and obnoxious to her, as he was of the same Party, had been assassinated before the Gates of *Orleans*. His Son, *Henry de Guise*, who made afterwards so great a Figure in the World, was but young; the Prince of *Conde* was dead; *Charles* the Ninth, her Son, was broken to her hand, and submissive to her Will; the Duke of *Anjou*, afterwards *Henry* the Third, was intirely in her Interest. She feared no other Enemies but *Jeanne d'Albret*, *Coligny*, and the Protestants: She thought one Blow could destroy them all, and fix her own Power for ever.

She worked up the King, and even the Duke of *Anjou* to her Design; all Things were agreed on, and the Snares prepared; an advantageous Peace was

was proposed to the Protestants: *Coligny*, tired with the Civil War, accepted of it eagerly. *Charles*, in order to leave no room for any Suspicion, gave his own Sister in Marriage to young *Henry* of *Navarre*. *Jeanne d'Albret*, allured by those deceitful Appearances, went with her Son, with *Coligny*, and with all the chief Protestants to Court. The Marriage was celebrated with Pomp, all the Endearments, all the Assurances of Friendship, all the Oaths which are sacred among Men, were profusely bestowed by *Catherine*, and by the King; the rest of the Court thought of nothing but Feasts, Plays, and Masquerades: At last, one Night (which was the Eve of *St. Bartholomew*, in the Month of *August* 1572) at twelve a-clock, the Signal is given, all the Houses of the Protestants are forced open at once; the Admiral *Coligny*, alarmed by the Uproar, rises out of Bed; a Troop of Assassins rush into his Chamber; one *Besme*, a *Lorrainer*, bred up a Servant in the Family of *Guise*, was at their Head; he thrusts his Sword into the Admiral's Breast, and gives him a back Stroke on the Face.

Henry, the young Duke of *Guise*, the same who framed afterwards the Catholick League, and who was murdered at *Blois*, was at the Door of *Coligny's* House, waiting for the Assassination; and cried aloud, *Besme, is it done?* Immediately the Assassins threw the Body out of the Window. *Coligny* fell and expired at the Feet of *Guise*; the young Man trampled upon him, not that he was drunk with the furious Catholick Zeal of Persecution, which at that time intoxicated half *France*, but he was prompted by the Spirit of Revenge, which, tho' not generally so unmerciful as the Fury of Religion, yet leads often to more base Actions.

Mean while all the Friends of *Coligny* are assaulted throughout *Paris*; Men, Women, and Children

Children are promiscuously slaughtered; every Street was strown with expiring Bodies: Some Priests holding up a Crucifix in one Hand, and a Sword in the other, ran at the Head of the Murderers, and encouraged them in the Name of God, to spare neither Relations nor Friends.

Tavannes, Marshal of *France*, an ignorant and superstitious Soldier, who joined the Fury of Religion to the Rage of Party, rid on horseback thro' *Paris*, crying to his Soldiers, *Let Blood, let Blood, bleeding is wholesome in the Month of August, as well as in May.*

The King's Palace was one of the chief Theatres of Murder; for the Prince *Henry* of *Navarre* had his Lodgings in the *Louvre*, and all his Domesticks were Protestants; many of them were killed in their Beds with their Wives; others were flying naked, and pursued by the Soldiers on the Stair-Cases, through all the Rooms of the Palace, nay even to the King's Anti-chamber. The young Wife of *Henry* of *Navarre* awakened by the dreadful Uproar, fearing for her Husband, and for herself, struck with Horror, and half dead, runs from her Bed, in order to throw herself at the Feet of the King, her Brother. She scarce had opened the Door of her Chamber, when some of her Protestant Servants rush into it for Refuge; the Soldiers enter after them; they pursue them in the sight of the Princess, one who crept under her Bed was killed there; two others pierced with Halberds, fell at her Feet, and she was all covered with their Blood.

There was a young Nobleman, very much in the King's favour for his comely Air, his Honesty, and a certain peculiar Happiness in the Turn of his Conversation.

'Twas the Earl of *la Rochefoucault*, Great-grandfather to the present Marquis of *Montendre*, who came

came over into *England* during another Persecution, less cruel, but not less unjust. *La Rochefoucault* had spent the Evening till eleven a-clock with the King in a pleasant Familiarity, and had given a loose to the Sallies of his Imagination with the utmost Mirth and Alacrity. The King felt a Remorse, and was struck with a Start of Compassion towards him; he bid him two or three times not to go home, but to lie in his Chamber. *La Rochefoucault* answered, he should go to his Wife. The King pressed him no further, and said, *Let him go, I see God has decreed his Death.* The young Man was massacred two hours after.

Few escaped in the general Slaughter; among these, the Deliverance of the young *la Force*, is a strange Instance of what Men call *Destiny*. He was a Boy of ten Years old. His Father, his elder Brother, and he were seized together by the Soldiers of the Duke *d'Anjou*. These Murderers fell upon all three promiscuously, and struck them at random; the Father and the Sons, covered with Blood, fell and lay upon one another. The youngest received not one Blow, counterfeited to be dead, and made his Escape the next day; his Life, so wonderfully preserved, lasted fourscore and five Years. He was the same famous Marshal *de la Force*, Uncle to the Duke of *la Force*, the deceased Husband of the present Dutchess *la Force*, who is now in *England*.

Mean while many of those miserable Victims fled to the River-side; some were swimming over to the *Fauxbourg S. Germain*. The King saw them from his Window, which look'd upon the River, and (what is almost incredible, but too true) he fired upon them with a Carabine. *Catherine de Medicis*, undisturbed and serene in the midst of the Slaughter, look'd down from a Balcony situated towards the City, encouraged the Assassins,

Assassins, and laugh'd at the dying Groans of the Murdered: her Maids of Honour, and some Ladies of the Court, went down into the Street, and with an impudent Curiosity tallying with the Abominations of that Age, observed the naked Body of one *Soubise*, who had been suspected of Impotency, and was just then killed under the Queen's Windows.

The Court reeking with the Blood of the Nation, tried some days after to palliate such a Crime with Forms of Law. They justified the Massacres with a Calumny; they imputed to the Admiral, a Conspiracy which no body believed. The Parliament was ordered to proceed against the Memory of *Coligny*, his dead Body was hanged in Chains at the Gallows of *Montfaucon*. The King himself went to see that loathsome Spectacle, and as one of his Courtiers advised him to retire, and complained of the Stench of the Corps, the King answered, *A dead Enemy smells sweet.*

That the Head of the Admiral was sent afterwards to the Pope, is a thing which cannot be proved. Certain it is that the Massacres of *St. Bartholomew's Day* are painted at *Rome* in the Royal Hall of the *Vatican*, with these Words under the Picture, *Pontifex Colignii necem probat.*

Young *Henry of Navarre* was spared rather by the Policy, than by the Pity of *Catherine*, who detained him a Prisoner, till the King's death, in order to make him a Security and a Pledge for the Submission of the Protestants who should escape.

As to *Jeanne d'Albret*, she died suddenly two or three Days before, and tho' perhaps her Death was natural, 'twas not a rash Opinion to believe her to have been poisoned; since one *Renato*, a Perfumer, who was come over from *Florence* in *Catherine's* Retinue, boasted of having sold poisoned Gloves to *Jeanne d'Albret* some days before her Death.

However the Execution was not confined alone to the City of *Paris*, the same Orders were sent from the Court to the Governors of all the Provinces of *France*; so that in a Week's Time, more than a Hundred Thousand Protestants were massacred all over the Kingdom.

Two or three Governors only refused to comply with the King's Orders; one among others, called *Montmorin*, Governor of *Auvergne*, wrote to the King the following Letter, which deserves to be transmitted to Posterity:

SIR,

I have received an Order under your Majesty's Seal to put to death all the Protestants in my Province. I have too much Respect for your Majesty not to believe the Letter is counterfeited; but, if (what God forbid) the Order is truly yours, I have too much Respect for your Majesty to obey it.

Those Massacres wrought, in the Protestants who escaped, Rage instead of Terror; their irreconcilable Hatred against the Court seem'd to supply them with new Vigor, and the Spirit of Revenge increased their Strength.

Not long after the King was taken with a strange Sickness, which carried him off in two Years. His Blood was daily stealing out, and gushing through the Pores of his Skin. Such an unaccountable Distemper, which was so much above the Knowledge and the Skill of Physicians, was look'd upon as a Divine Vengeance, as if the Blood of a Prince could atone for the Blood of so many thousand innocent Men.

During the Sickness of *Charles*, his Brother *Anjou* had been elected King of *Poland*, on account

count of the great Reputation which he had happily obtain'd when he was a General, and which he lost, when a King.

As soon as he knew of his Brother's Death, he stole away from *Poland*, and ran into *France*, to enjoy the dangerous Inheritance of a Kingdom shattered by Factions, fatal to its Sovereigns, and stained with the Blood of its Inhabitants. He found, at his arrival, nothing but Parties and Calamities, which he increas'd to the last degree.

Henry, then King of *Navarre*, headed the Protestants, and gave new Life to their Party. On the other Side, the young Duke of *Guise* began to dazzle the Eyes of the World with his great and dangerous Qualities; he had a Genius more enterprising than his Father. He seem'd besides to have a fair Opportunity of aiming at that pitch of Grandeur to which his Father had opened the way.

Anjou, now *Henry* the Third, was reputed unable to get Children, because of the Infirmities, which the Debauches of his Youth had brought upon him. *Henry* of *Navarre* was the lawful Heir of the Crown. *Guise* try'd to secure it to himself, (at least after the Death of *Henry* the Third) and to wrest it from the House of *Capet*, as formerly the *Capets* had usurped it from the Descendants of *Charlemagne*, and as the Father of *Charlemagne* from his lawful Sovereign.

Never did so bold an Undertaking seem so well and so happily laid. *Henry* of *Navarre*, and all the House of *Bourbon*, were Protestants. *Guise* began to ingratiate himself with the Nation by the outward shew of a Catholick Zeal. His Liberality secured to him the common People; he had all the Clergy at his devotion, Friends in the Parliament, Spies at Court, Servants throughout all the Kingdom. His first politick Step was to make an Association, under the Name of the *Holy League*,
against

against the Protestants, for the Security of the Catholick Religion; half the Kingdom came with eagerness into that new Project. Pope *Sixtus Quintus* blessed the League, and supported it as a new *Romish* Militia. *Philip* the Second, King of *Spain*, according to the Policy of all Sovereigns, who always help on the Ruin of their Neighbours, gave all sorts of Encouragement to the League, in order to rend *France* to pieces, and enrich himself with its Spoils.

Thus *Henry* being still an Enemy to the Protestants, found himself betray'd by the Catholics; surrounded with secret and open Foes, and overpowered by a Subject, who, tho' submissive in appearance, was really more King than himself.

The only way, perhaps, to emerge from these Difficulties, was to join with *Henry* of *Navarre*, whose Fidelity, Courage, and indefatigable Spirit, was the only Match for *Guise*, and who could secure to the King all the Protestant Party, which would have thrown much Weight into the Balance.

The King over-ruled by *Guise* (whom he distrusted, but durst not provoke) terrified by the Pope, betray'd by his Counsellors, and by his wrong Policy, took the contrary way. He put himself at the Head of the *Holy League*, in hopes to master it: He united with *Guise* his Rebel-Subject, against his Successor, and his Brother-in-law, whom Nature and true Policy pointed for his Ally.

Henry of *Navarre* was now in *Gascogne* at the head of a little Army, while a strong body of Troops was coming to his Relief from the Protestant Princes of *Germany*, through the Borders of *Lorrain*.

The King imagined that he could at once reduce the *Navarrois*, and sink *Guise*; in order to that, he sent the latter with a small inconsiderable Army
against

against the *Germans*, by whom he had like to have been overcome.

At the same time he caus'd his Favourite *Joyeuse* to march against the *Navarrois*, with the Flower of the *French* Nobility, and with one of the strongest Armies that had appear'd in the Field since *Francis* the First. He was disappointed in all his hopes; *Henry* of *Navarre* defeated intirely at *Couttras* his powerful Army, and *Guise* got the better of the *Germans*.

The only Use the *Navarrois* made of his Victory, was to offer a sure Peace to the Kingdom, and his Assistance to the King; but he was refus'd, tho' Conqueror, because the King was still more afraid of his Subjects than of him.

Guise return'd victorious to *Paris*; he was receiv'd like the Saviour of the Nation, his Party grew more audacious, the King more despis'd, inso much that *Guise* seem'd to have triumph'd over him more than over the *Germans*.

The King press'd on every side, awak'd from his Lethargy, but too late; he try'd to humble the League, he design'd to seize some of the most seditious Citizens, he had the Courage to forbid *Guise* to come to *Paris*; but he felt at his own Expence what it is to command without Power. *Guise* came to *Paris* in defiance of his Orders; the Citizens rose up in Arms, the King's Guards were taken Prisoners, and himself invested in his Palace. Men are seldom good or bad enough. Had *Guise* attempted that Day against the Liberty or the Life of the King, he had been in all likelihood Master of *France*: But he let him escape after having besieged him; and thus he did too much and too little.

Henry the Third fled to *Blois*, where he held the general States of the Kingdom.

- These

These States resemble the Parliament of *Great Britain* in their Convocation, but are very different from it in their Operations; as they are very seldom call'd, they have no Rules to guide them: they are generally made up of Men who never having been in any regular Meeting, know not how to behave themselves; and 'tis rather a Confusion than an Assembly.

Guise did not stick at going to *Blois* to defy his Sovereign before the Representatives of the Nation, after having expelled him from his Capital.

Henry and he made a solemn Reconciliation. They went together to the same Altar, they receiv'd the Communion together; the one swore to forget all the past Injuries, the other to be for ever true and obedient: And at that very time the King intended to put *Guise* to death, and *Guise* to dethrone the King.

Guise was sufficiently warn'd to beware of *Henry*; but he despis'd him so much, as not to think him bold enough, even to attempt an Assassination. This Rashness betray'd him. The King was resolv'd to be revenged on him, and upon his Brother the Cardinal of *Guise*, the Partner of his ambitious Designs, and the most ardent Promoter of the League. He provided Daggers himself, and distributed them to some *Gascoons*, who offer'd to be the Ministers of his Vengeance. They murdered *Guise* in the King's Closet; but these very Men who ponyarded him, refused to embrue their Hands in the Blood of his Brother, because he was a Priest, and a Cardinal; as if the Life of one who wears a Band and a Cassock, were more sacred, than that of one who wears a short Vest and a Sword.

The King met with four common Soldiers, who, as the Jesuit *Maimbourg* says, having not so much honour as the aforesaid Gentlemen, killed the Cardinal for an hundred Crowns a-piece.

The two Brothers were put to death under *Catherine* of *Medicis*' Apartment; but she was totally ignorant of her Son's Design, being at that time distrustful by all Parties, and forsaken even by the King.

Had such a Vengeance been perpetrated with the Formalities of the Law, which are the natural Instruments of the Justice of Kings, or the natural Veil to their Iniquity, it had terrified the League; but as it wanted that solemn Form, it was look'd upon as a villanous Murder, and did but exasperate the Party. The Blood of the *Guises* invigorated the Strength of the League, as the Death of *Coligny* had given a new Life to the Protestants. Many Towns in *France* declared openly against the King; he went immediately to *Paris*, but he found the Gates shut against him, and all the City in Arms.

The famous Duke of *Mayenne*, younger Brother to the late Duke of *Guise*, was then in *Paris*. He was eclips'd by the Glory of *Guise* during his Life; but after his Death, he prov'd as dangerous a Foe as his Brother; for all his Qualities were as great, tho' not so shining.

The House of *Lorraine* was very numerous in *Paris*. The mighty Name of *Guise*, their Magnificence, their Liberality, their apparent Zeal for the Catholick Religion, had made them the Darlings of the City. Priests, Burgeffes, Women, Magistrates, Soldiers, all united vigorously with *Mayenne* in the pursuit of a Vengeance that was thought very just.

The Duke's Widow presented a Petition to the Parliament against *Henry* as a Murderer. The Trial begun according to the common Form of Law; two Counsellors were appointed to draw up the Articles of Impeachment against the King, but the Parliament did not proceed further, the Heads of that Assembly being firmly attached to the Royal Cause.

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The Doctors of *Sorbonne* were not so cautious, Seventy of that Society issued forth a Writ, by which *Henry de Valois* was deprived of his Right to the Crown; and the Oaths of Allegiance were dissolved.

But the most dangerous Enemies to the Royal Authority, were some private Burgeses of *Paris*, called the *Sixteen*; not because of their Number, for they were Forty, but from the sixteen Wards of *Paris*, which they had divided among themselves to rule over. The most considerable of these Citizens, was one *le Clerc*, who had assumed the great Name of *Bussi*. He was a bold Burges, and a bad Soldier, like his Associates. These Sixteen had got an absolute Power, and grew at last as insupportable to the Duke of *Mayenne* himself, as terrible to the King.

Moreover, the Priests, who have ever been the Trumpeters of all the Revolutions in the World, thundered in the Pulpit, and assured, in the Name of God, that whosoever should attempt to kill the Tyrant, should go infallibly to Heaven. The sacred and dangerous Names of *Ehud*, of *Judith*, and all the Assassinations which the holy Scripture hath consecrated, were then cried out every where into the Ears of the Nation.

The King, in such an Extremity, was forced at last to call to his Aid the same *Navarrois*, whose Help he had refused before. This Prince was better pleased to support his Brother, and his King, than to have vanquish'd him.

He brought his Army over to the King, but before his Troops were arriv'd, he went forward to him, follow'd by a single Page. The King was amazed at such a piece of Generosity, which he had himself been incapable of.

However, the two Kings marched to *Paris* at the Head of a powerful Army. The Town was not in a condition to resist. The League was up-

on the brink of Ruin, when a young Fryar, of the Order of *St. Dominic*, chang'd the whole Face of Affairs.

His Name was *James Clement*, born in a Village of *Burgundy*, call'd *Sorbonne*, and then Four and twenty Years of Age. His surly Piety, and melancholy Mind, had been work'd up to *Enthusiasm* by the common Cry of the Priests. He took upon him to be the Deliverer and the Martyr of the holy League. He discovered his Design to his Friends, and to his Superiors; all encouraged him, and made a Saint of him before-hand. *Clement* prepar'd himself for his Undertaking; he fasted, spent whole Nights in Prayer, confess'd his Sins, receiv'd the Sacrament, bought a good Dagger, and went away to *S. Cloud*, where the King had his Quarters. He asked for admittance to the King, under pretence of revealing an important Secret, which could allow of no delay. Being brought before his Majesty, he kneeled down, and with a blushing Modesty delivered into his Hands a Letter, which he pretended was writ by the first President, *Achilles de Harlay*. As the King was perusing the Letter, the Fryar stabb'd him in the Belly, and left the Dagger sticking in the Wound; then, with an unconcerned Look, crossed his Hands over his Breast, and lifted up his Eyes to Heaven, waiting for the Event, without stirring.

The King cries out, rises up, snatches the Dagger from his own Belly, and thrusts it into the Forehead of the Murderer.

Many Courtiers rush in at the Noise. It had been their Duty to secure the Fryar, and reserve him for Examination and Torture, in order to a Discovery of his Accomplices. But they kill'd him on the spot, with a Precipitation that laid them under the Suspicion of having known too much of his Design.

Henry of Navarre was now King of *France* by his Birth-right; part of the Army acknowledged him, and part forsook him.

Duke d'*Epernon*, and some others, retired; alledging they were too good Catholicks, to fight for a King who did not go to Mass. They secretly hoped that a total Subversion of the Kingdom (which they wish'd for, and relied on) would give them an opportunity of making themselves Sovereigns in their respective Manors.

Mean-while, the Deed of *Clement* was approved at *Rome*, and himself worshipped in *Paris*. The *Holy League* acknowledged for their King the Cardinal of *Bourbon*, an old Priest, Uncle to *Henry* the Fourth; in order to show the World, that it was the Hereticks, and not the House of *Bourbon*, which their hatred pursued.

Thus the Duke of *Mayenne* was wise enough not to assume the Title of King, yet to get all the Royal Power in his hands; while the miserable Cardinal of *Bourbon*, whom the *League* call'd King, was kept Prisoner by *Henry* the Fourth during the remainder of his life, which lasted but two years.

The *League*, more supported than ever by the Pope, assisted by the *Spaniards*, and extremely powerful by itself, was at the height of its Grandeur; and look'd down upon *Henry* the Fourth with that hatred which Religion inspires, and with a Contempt begot by their Successes.

Henry had few Friends, few great Towns, no Money, a small Army; but his Courage, his Activity, his Policy, supplied all those Wants. He gained several Victories, especially that of *Ivry* against *Mayenne*. This Battle was one of the most remarkable that ever was fought. The two Generals exerted on that Day all their Art, the Soldiers all their Courage, few Faults were committed on either Side. *Henry* ow'd at last the Victory to

the Superiority of his Knowledge and Valour ; but he confess'd that *Mayenne* had fulfill'd all the Duties of a great General. He *was*, said the King, deficient only *in his Cause*.

He prov'd as clement in the Victory as he was terrible in the Battle. He knew besides, that Power is often lessened by the full use of it, and extended by Moderation. He stopp'd the Fury of the Soldiers who were pursuing the Enemy, he took care of the wounded, set at Liberty many Prisoners. Yet so much Valour, and so much Generosity did not mollify the Heart of the League.

The Civil Wars of *France* were now become the Quarrel of *Europe*. King *Philip* the Second was eagerly engaged in the defence of the League: Queen *Elizabeth* gave all sorts of Assistance to *Henry*, not because he was a Protestant ; but because he was an Enemy to *Philip* the Second, whose incroaching Power was dangerous to herself : She sent him five thousand Men under the command of the Earl of *Essex* her Favourite, the same whom she caused afterwards to be beheaded.

The King continued the War with various Success : In one Day he took by Storm all the Suburbs of *Paris*. He had taken the Town perhaps likewise, had he had no other View but to conquer. But he was afraid of giving up his Capital as a Prey to the Soldiery, and of destroying the City which he had a mind to save. He besieged *Paris*, he raised the Siege, he begun it again, at last he block'd it up, and cut off all the Communications to the Town, hoping that the Scarcity of Provisions would force the *Parisians* to surrender without Bloodshed.

But *Mayenne*, the Priests, and the Sixteen Burgeses managed so dexterously the Spirits of the People, work'd up their Hatred against the Hereticks to such a degree, and fool'd their Imagination to such an Enthusiasm, that they chose rather to die by Hunger, than to submit. The

The Friars and the Monks made a Show, which, as ridiculous as it was in itself, was yet of great use to animate the People. They made a kind of military Muster, marching in Rank and Files, wearing rusty Armours over their Couls, having at their Head the Figure of the *Virgin Mary*, wielding Swords in their Hands, and crying, *they were all ready to fight and to die in the Defence of the Faith*. So that the Citizens who saw their Confessors in Arms, thought really that they fought the Cause of God.

However, Scarcity occasioned soon an universal Famine. That prodigious Multitude of Citizens had no other Support but the Sermons of their Priests, and the fictitious Miracles of Friars, who, by the way had all things in plenty in their Convents, while all the Town was reduced to starve. The miserable *Parisians* lull'd at first by the hopes of being soon reliev'd, were singing Ballads in the Streets, and Lampoons against *Henry*; a Fact not to be related with Probability of any other Nation, but suitable enough to the Genius of the *French*, even in so desolate a Condition. That short-liv'd wretched Mirth was stopp'd quickly by the most serious and the most inexpressible Misery. Thirty thousand Men died of Hunger in a Month's time. The poor starv'd Citizens tried to make a Sort of Bread with the Bones of the Dead, which being bruised and boiled, were reduc'd to a kind of Jelly. But such an unnatural Food afforded them no other manner of Benefit than to kill them the sooner. It is recorded and confirmed by all the Testimonies which can be credible, that a Woman kill'd and fed on her own Child. Moreover, the stubborn Obstinacy of the *Parisians* was equal to their Calamities. *Henry* pitied their Condition more than they did themselves; his Good-Nature prevail'd over his Interest.

He suffered his Soldiers to sell privately all Sorts of Provisions to the Town; thus it happened, what was never seen before, that the Besieger fed the Besieged. 'Twas a singular Spectacle to see the Soldiers from the Bottom of their Trenches send up Victuals to the Citizens, who were throwing down Money to them from the Ramparts. Many Officers prompted by the Licentiousness common to a military Life, bartered a Sirloin of Beef for a Wench; so that one might have seen Women getting down in Baskets, and the Baskets hoisted up again full of Provisions. By these Means the Officers were taken up with an unseasonable Licentiousness, the Soldiers got too much Money, the besieged were relieved, and *Henry* lost the Town. For in the mean time an Army of *Spaniards* came from the Low Countries; the King was obliged to raise the Siege, and run again through all the Toils and Vicissitudes of War, till at last the *Spaniards* being driven out of the Kingdom, he came a third Time before *Paris*, that was still more strongly bent against receiving him.

Now the Cardinal of *Bourbon*, that Mock-King, was dead: An Assembly was held in *Paris* under the Name of the General-States of the Kingdom to proceed to the Election of a new King. *Spain* influenced powerfully those States. *Mayenne* had a strong Party, who would have plac'd the Crown on his Head. At last, *Henry* tired with the cruel Necessity of waging an eternal War against his Subjects, knowing besides they hated his Religion, not him, resolved to turn *Roman* Catholick; for the Priests were the only Enemies he was afraid of. Few Weeks after, *Paris* opened its Gates to him, and what his Valour and his Magnanimity could never bring about, was easily obtain'd by going to Mass, and by receiving Absolution from the Pope.



A N
E S S A Y
 O N
EPICK POETRY.



WE have in every Art more Rules than Examples, for Men are more fond of teaching, than able to perform; so there are more Commentators than Poets; and many Writers who could not make two Verses, have over-charg'd us with voluminous Treatises of Poetry. All those Teachers seem'd to have much labour'd by their Definitions, Distinctions, &c. to spread a profound Obscurity over Things in their own nature clear and perspicuous; and 'tis no wonder if such Law-givers, unequal to the Burthen which they took upon themselves, have embroil'd the States which they intended to regulate.

The greatest Part of the Criticks have fetch'd the Rules of *Epick* Poetry from the Books of *Homer*, according to the Custom, or rather, to the Weakness

ness of Men, who mistake commonly the Beginning of an Art, for the Principles of the Art itself, and are apt to believe, that every thing must be by its own Nature, what it was, when contriv'd at first. But as *Homer* wrote two Poems of a quite different Nature, and as the *Eneid* of *Virgil* partakes of the *Iliad*, and of the *Odyssey*, the Commentators were forc'd to establish different Rules to reconcile *Homer* with himself, and other new Rules again to make *Virgil* agree with *Homer*: Just as the Astronomers labour'd under the necessity of adding to, or taking from their Systems, and of bringing in concentric, and excentric Circles, as they discover'd new Motions in the Heavens.

The Ignorance of the Astronomers was excusable, and their Search after the unfathomable System of Nature, was to be commended; because it is certain, that Nature hath its own Principles unvariable, unerring, and as worthy of our Search, as remote from our Conceptions.

But it is not with the Inventions of Art, as with the Works of Nature. The same Fancy which hath invented Poetry, changes every Day all its Productions, because it is liable itself to eternal Vicissitudes. The Poetry and Musick of the *Persians*, differ as much from ours, as their Language. Even a Nation differs from it self, in less than a Century. There are not more Revolutions in Governments, than in Arts. They are shifting, and gliding away from our Pursuit, when we endeavour to fix them by our Rules and Definitions.

If I am to give a Definition of a Suit of Clothes, I ought not to describe any partitular one. Neither the *Roman*, nor the *Greek*, nor the *French*, ought to be set up for a Pattern: A Suit of Clothes in itself, is the Covering of the Body; that is all that is essential to it. The rest is but accessory Ornament, which Fancy and Custom create, preserve, and destroy

destroy at their Will; and if we like one Fashion best, we are not to exclude every other.

So 'tis perhaps with *Epick* Poetry. The Word *Epick* comes from *Epos*, which signifies Discourse. An *Epick* Poem is a Discourse in Verse. Use alone has prefix'd the Name of *Epick*, particularly to those Poems which relate some great Action. Let the Action be single or complex, let it lie in one single Place, as in the *Iliad*, or let the Hero wander all the World over, as in the *Odysssey*; let there be one single Hero, or a great many; happy, or unfortunate; furious as *Achilles*, or pious as *Aeneas*; let them be Kings, or Generals, or neither of them; let the Scene lie upon the *Indian* Ocean, as in the *Lusiada* of *Camouens*; in the *West-Indies*, as in the *Araucana* of *Alonzo* of *Ereilla*; in Hell, in Heaven, out of the Limits of our Nature, as in *Milton*; the Poem will equally deserve the Name of *Epick*, unless you have a mind to honour it with another Title proportionable to its Merit.

In so boundless a Career, the Point of the Question, and of the Difficulty, is to know what all polite Nations agree upon, and in what they differ.

An *Epick* Poem ought to be grounded upon Judgment, and embellish'd by Imagination; what belongs to good Sense, belongs to all the Nations of the World. The *Greeks*, the *Romans*, the *Italians*, *French*, *English* and *Spaniards*, tell us in all their Works, that they chiefly like *Unity of Action*, because the Understanding is better satisfy'd when it reposes upon a single Object, adequate to our View, and which we may take in easily, than when it is lost in the Hurry of Confusion.

They tell us, that such an *Unity* ought to be attended with Variety, as a Body is made up of Members, all different, and all conducive to the same End; that the Action should be *great*, to strike us
with

with Awe; *interesting*, because we delight in being mov'd; *entire*, that our Minds may be wholly satisfy'd.

These, and the like, are a Kind of eternal Laws, submitted to by all Nations, because exacted by Nature. But the *Machinery*, the *Episodes*, the *Stile* itself, and all that depends upon that Instinct call'd *Taste*, and upon the Tyranny of Custom, that is the Point in which there are too many Opinions and no Rules.

It is true, there are Beauties which the Taste of every Nation equally relish. Since all *Europe* hath set up the *Greek*, and *Roman* Authors for Models of Writing, *Homer* and *Demosthenes*, *Virgil* and *Tully*, have in some measure united under their Laws our *European* Nations, and made of so many and different Countries, a single Common-wealth of Letters. But still our particular Customs have introduc'd among them all, a new Sort of Taste, peculiar to each Nation.

The best modern Writers have mix'd the Taste of their Country, with that of the Antients. Their Flowers, and their Fruits, warm'd and matur'd by the same Sun, yet draw from the Soil they grow upon, their different Colours, their Flavours and their Size. It is as easy to distinguish a *Spanish*, an *Italian*, or an *English* Author, by their *Stile*, as to know by their Gait, their Speech, and their Features, in what Country they were born.

The *Italian* Softness, their Witticism, so often degenerating into Conceit; the pompous and metaphorical *Stile* of the *Spaniard*, the Exactness and Perspicuity of the *French*, the Strength peculiar to the *English*, their Fondness of Allegories, their running into Similes, are so many distinguishable Marks, which do not escape the Observation of proper Judges.

From

From their different Characters flows that Dislike that every Nation shows for the Taste of its Neighbour. Hence it is that the Battle of the Angels in *Milton*, would not succeed among the *French*. Hence it is that the long, but noble Speeches of *Cinna*, and *Augustus*, in *Corneille*, could not be tolerated upon the *English* Stage.

These following Lines of *Tasso*, are admired in *Italy*, learnt by heart, and in every body's mouth.

*Colei Sophronia, Olindo egli s'apella,
D'una cittade entrambi, e d'una fede.
Ei che modesto è si com' essa e bella,
Brama assai, poco spera, e nulla chiede,
Ne sa Scoprirsi, o non ardisce; e ella,
O lo Sprezza, o no'l vede, o non s'avede;
Così fin hora il misero ha servito,
O non visto, o mal noto, o mal gradito.*

There is nothing in these Lines, that offends against good Sense; but such a jingling of Words, that over-nice Symmetry of Expression, that curl'd Thought revolving on itself, won't methinks be applauded by a *French*, or an *English* Reader, who require a more serious and more majestick Simplicity in *Heroick* Poetry.

Among many Passages of *Milton*, which every *French* Reader would startle at, I beg leave to quote one, which has here more Partisans than Criticks; 'tis in the first *Canto*.

*At once as far as Angels Ken, he views
The dismal Situation, waste and wild,
A Dungeon horrible, on all Sides round,
As one great Furnace flam'd; yet from those Flames
No Light, but rather a Darknes visible,
Serv'd only to discover Sights of Woe.*

Antonio

Antonio de Solis, in his excellent History of *Mexico*, hath ventur'd on the same Thought, when speaking of the Place wherein *Montezuma* was wont to consult his Deities; " 'Twas a large dark subterraneous Vault, says he, where some dismal Tapers afforded just Light enough to see the " Obscurity."

Such daring Thoughts would be look'd upon as Nonsense, by a *French* Critick, whose Exactness is often call'd in *England* Timidity. And since the greatest Poet among the *English*, and the best Writer among the *Spaniards*, have not scrupled to indulge now and then such Flights bordering on Bombast, that proves at least, that in their Countries, the Authors have a more free Scope than in *France*.

I need no more Examples to demonstrate, that there is such a Thing as a National Taste.

This once granted, if we have a mind to get a true Knowledge of *Epick* Poetry, it would be worth our while to take a Survey of all the different Poems of that Kind, which have succeeded in different Ages, and in different Countries.

'Tis not enough to be acquainted with *Virgil*, and *Homer*. As in regard to Tragedy, a Man who has only perus'd *Sophocles* and *Euripides*, could not have an entire Notion of the Stage. We should be their Admirers, not their Slaves. We do not speak the same Language. Our Religion (the great Basis of *Epick* Poetry) is the very Reverse of their Mythology: Our Battles, our Sieges, our Fleets, are more different from theirs, than our Manners from those of *America*. The Invention of Gun-Powder, that of the Compass, that of Printing, so many Arts besides newly emerg'd into the World, have alter'd the Face of the Universe; and an *Epick* Poet, being surrounded with so many Novelties, must have but a small Share of Genius, if he durst not be new himself.

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We send our Children to travel into neighbouring Countries, after they have read *Virgil* and *Homer* at School. Should their Time be ill employ'd in getting a thorough Knowledge of *Milton* in *England*, or of *Tasso* in *Italy*? Where are Monuments to be found which better deserve the Observation of a Traveller?

Our just Respect for the Ancients, proves a mere Superstition, if it betrays us into a rash Contempt of our Neighbours and Countrymen. We ought not to do such an Injury to Nature, as to shut our Eyes to all the Beauties that her Hands pour around us, in order to look back fixedly on her former Productions.

'Tis a Pleasure, no doubt, and a great Improvement of our Mind, to survey all the *Epick* Writers in their respective Countries, from *Homer* down to *Milton*; and to observe the different Features, and the various Dresses of those great Men.

'Tis a Task beyond the Reach of my Capacity, to give a full Prospect of them. I shall but faintly touch the first Lines of their Pictures. Some abler Hand will add the finishing Strokes to this imperfect Drawing.

The judicious Reader will supply the Defects, and inforce the feeble Hints he will find in this Essay. My Part is to propose, his to judge; and his Judgment will be right, if he attends without Partiality, laying aside the Prejudices of the School, or the over-bearing Love of the Productions of his own Country.

He will mark the Progresses, the Sinking of the Art, its Rising again, and pursue it through its various Changes. He will distinguish the Beauties, and the Faults which are such, every where, and in all Ages, from those doubtful Things which are call'd Blemishes by one Nation, and stil'd Perfections by another.

He will not be tyranniz'd by *Aristotle*, *Castelvetro*, *Dacier*, *Le Bossu*; but he will extract his own Rules from the various Examples he shall have before his Eyes, and govern'd by his good Sense alone, be a Judge between the Gods of *Homer* and the God of *Milton*; and between *Calipso*, *Dido*, *Armida*, and *Eve*.

But if the Reader be so just, as to make Allowances for the Time, in which those different Authors have writ; it is to be hoped, he will look with some Indulgence on the Diction of this Essay, and pardon the Failings of one who has learn'd *English* but this Year; of one who has drawn most of his Observations from Books written in *England*; and who pays to this Country but Part of what he owes to her. A Nurse is not displeased with the stammering Articulations of a Child, who delivers to her with much ado, his first undigested Thoughts.

H O M E R.

IT would seem too assuming, and prove very useless, to expatiate upon *Homer* and *Virgil*, especially in *England*, where there is scarce a Gentleman unacquainted with *Latin* and *Greek*.

As to *Homer*, those who cannot read him in the Original, have Mr. *Pope's* Translation; they may discern the Fire of that Father of Poetry reflected from such a polish'd and faithful Glass. I will neither point out his Beauties, since none of them are lost in the Translation, nor cavil at his Faults, which are for the most part lessen'd or embellish'd.

Let every Reader consult himself when he reads *Homer*, and reflect how that Poem works upon his Mind: then he will judge if *Homer* hath reach'd to the utmost Pitch of the Art, in any thing else, but
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in that predominant Force of *Painting*, which makes his peculiar Character.

Notwithstanding the Veneration due, and paid to *Homer*, it is very strange, yet true, that among the most learned, and the greatest Admirers of Antiquity, there is scarce one to be found, who ever read the *Iliad*, with that Eagerness and Rapture, which a Woman feels when she reads the Novel of *Zaida*: And as to the common Mass of Readers, less conversant with Letters, but not perhaps endow'd with a less Share of Judgment and Wit, few have been able to go through the whole *Iliad*, without struggling against a secret Dislike; and some have thrown it aside, after the fourth or the fifth Book. How does it come to pass, that *Homer* hath so many Admirers, and so few Readers; and is at the same time worshipp'd and neglected?

I'll endeavour to give some Reasons for this Paradox. The common Part of Mankind is aw'd with the Fame of *Homer*, rather than struck with his Beauties. The judicious Reader is pleas'd, no doubt, with the noble Imagination of that great Author; but very few have command enough over their own Prejudices, and can transport themselves far enough into such a remote Antiquity, as to become the Contemporaries of *Homer* when they read him. Good Sense bids them to make Allowances for the Manners of his Time, but 'tis almost impossible to bring themselves to a quick Relish of them. The Rays of his Light, transmitted to their Eyes through so long a Way, afford them but a feeble glimmering Twilight, and no Warmth. They are like the old Counsellors of *Priam*, who confess'd, without any Emotion of Heart, that *Helen* was a Beauty.

A second Reason of their Dislike, is that Uniformity which seems diffused through all the Work. The Battels take up three Parts of the whole *Iliad*.

The Reader is more likely to be disgusted by the continual Glare of that predominant Colour which is spread over the Poem, than to be pleased with the Variety of Tints and Shades, which require a refin'd Sight to perceive them.

Thirdly, The Poem is certainly too long; and 'tis an Exception that all the *Epick* Poets are liable to: For there is no *Epick* Poetry without a powerful Imagination, and no great Imagination without over-flowing.

I wave here all the Quarrels, rais'd by the Enemies of *Homer*, to such Parts of his Poems as may be the Objects of our Criticism, but never the Cause of our Sleep.

His Gods are perhaps at once absurd and entertaining, as the Madness of *Ariosto* amuses us with a bewitching Delight. And for his other Faults, the Majesty, and the Fire of his Style, brightens them often into Beauties.

But in my Opinion, the best Reason for that Languour which creeps upon the Mind of so many Readers, in spite of the Flashes which rouse it now and then, is, that *Homer* interests us for none of his Heroes. *Achilles* is too boisterous to inspire us with a tender Concern for him. And suppose his very Fierceness could extort from us that favourable Disposition which the over-powering Idea of Valour generally forces us into, his long Idleness wears away the Thought of him; and as the Poet lays him aside, so does the Reader.

Menelaus, who is the only Occasion of the War, and in whom of course our Affections ought to center, is very far from being a shining Character. *Paris*, his Rival, excites our Contempt. *Menelaus* is in the Poem, but the Brother of *Agamemnon*, and *Paris* the Brother of *Hector*. *Agamemnon*, King of Kings, shocks us with his Pride, without giving us any great Idea of his Conduct. I do not know

know how it comes to pass, but every Reader bears secretly an ill Will to the wife *Ulysses*. The fair *Helena*, the Cause of so great Mischiefs, is insignificant enough. No body cares whose Share she will fall to, since she seems herself indifferent between her two Husbands.

When two Warriors fight in the *Iliad*, we are aw'd indeed with the Description, nay often transported with their Fury; but we feel neither Hope nor Fear for any of them.

We are like *Juno* in the *Aeneid*,

Tros Rutulūsqve fuat, nullo discrimine habebō.

We pity indeed the Misfortunes of *Priam*, nor will I quarrel with the Tears that we give to his Afflictions. I wish only that *Homer* would have interested us for the *Greeks*, throughout all the Poem, since he intends to praise them, and since they are the Heroes of the Poem: But I'll go no further than to observe, that if we are mov'd with the Sorrow of *Priam*, at the very End of the Poem, we are indifferent towards him in the Course of the Action.

Of all the Warriors, the courageous, the tender, and the pious *Hector*, deserves most our Affections. He hath the best Character, tho' he defends the wrong Cause; and he is betray'd by the Gods, though he hath so much Virtue.

But our Concern for him is lost in the Croud of so many Heroes: Our Attention is divided and lessen'd, like a Stream cut into many Rivulers.

Thus the Reader's Imagination is often fill'd with great and noble Ideas, while the Affections of the Soul stagnate: And if in any long Work whatever, the Motions of the Heart do not keep pace with the Pleasures of the Fancy, 'tis no wonder if we may at once admire and be tir'd.

If all these Reasons are contested, (for what Assertion of our Mind is undisputable?) I must add a further Observation, which is a Matter of Fact out of the reach of Dispute. Many of the Books of the *Iliad* are independent from one another; they might be transpos'd without any great Alteration in the Action: And perhaps, for that Reason, they were call'd Rhapsodies. I leave to the Judgment of the Reader, if such a Work, let it be never so well written, never so teeming with Beauties, can be interesting, and win our Attention.

VIRGIL.

MR. *Addison* was the first who considered in their proper View, the Materials which compos'd the Structure of the *Æneid*.

It is certain *Virgil* fram'd his Poem out of many Fables concerning the Settlement of *Æneas* in *Italy*, handed down to his Time, which were credited by the People, with a kind of superstitious Belief.

In the like Manner, it is probable, *Homer* founded his *Iliad* upon the Tradition of the *Trojan War*.

For to believe *Homer* and *Virgil* submitted before-hand, to the Rules laid down by *Le Bossu*, who bids an *Epick* Poet invent, and dispose the Constitution of his Fable, before he thinks of the Name of his Heroes, is not indeed natural: In all likelihood they did not cut the Coat, without knowing whose Shape it could fit. Such a Rule may be observ'd in Comedy, which deals chiefly in the Exposition of the Manners, and of the Ridicule of the Age; or delights in a Plot, made up of surprising, but little Incidents, which never requir

quire the Testimony of History, or the Weight of any celebrated Name.

But the *Epick*, as well as the *Tragick* Poets, generally pitch upon a Subject, and a Hero well known, whose single Name must strike the Reader with Awe, and command his Attention. They adapt their Invention to the History: For if one should begin by laying down a Fable intirely of his own Imagination, all the Records in the Universe could not afford him an Event, adequate to his Plan; he must needs alter it. And I cannot apprehend why Mr. *Le Bossu* advises to build what must necessarily be destroy'd.

Whatever it be, part of the Events included in the *Æneid*, are to be found in *Dionysius Halicarnassus*. He mentions with Accuracy, the Course of the Navigation of *Æneas*. He does not omit the Fable of the *Harpies*, the Predictions uttered by *Celano*, the eating up of the Cakes, &c.

As to the Metamorphose of the Ships into Nymphs, if *Dionysius* does not mention it, *Virgil* himself takes care to justify such an Absurdity, by telling us, that it was an ancient Tradition;

Prisca fides facta, sed fama perennis.

It seems that *Virgil*, ashamed of such a Fairy Tale, hath a mind to excuse it by the common Belief.

Many Passages of *Virgil*, considered in this View, are entirely vindicated against his Criticks, whose good Sense was misled, in that Particular, by their Inattention.

If an Author among the *French* attempts a Poem on *Clovis*, he is allow'd to speak of the Holy Vial, brought down from Heaven, in the Bill of a Dove, into the Church of *Rheims*, for the Coronation of the King. If an *English* Writer takes King *Arthur* for his Subject, he may without Censure bring in

the Incantations of *Merlin*; it being the Fate of all those ancient Fables, which the Beginning of every Nation is involv'd in, to be rever'd for their Antiquity, when they are laugh'd at for their Absurdity: But upon the Whole, it would be better to omit them, though we are allow'd to mention them; for a single Reader of Sense, who will be shock'd at such Stories, deserves more Respect, than the Croud which gives them Credit.

As to the Construction of his Fable, he is accus'd by some, and commended by others; for having follow'd *Homer* closely: But if I dare speak my Opinion, he deserves neither such an Injury, nor such a Compliment: He could not avoid introducing the Gods of *Homer*, who were the Roman Gods too, nor talking of the Siege of *Troy*, since *Aeneas* was a *Trojan* Hero.

Those Things were common to the *Greek* Author, and to him. He draws his Richesses from the same Source, but not at the Expence of his Predecessor.

Virgil, 'tis true, hath translated some Passages of the *Iliad*, and of the *Odyssey*; he hath borrow'd some little Descriptions, some obvious Similies, which surely his great Genius did not want; by which but a little Glory could accrue to him, and which are rather an Honour paid by him to *Homer*, than a Proof his standing in need of Help.

'Tis pleasant to see how some Criticks have triumph'd, in the Discovery of those Trifles. Those who take up Arms for *Homer* against *Virgil*, and who sacrifice the Pleasure of being pleas'd with both, to the chimerical Fancy of raising the Glory of the one, at the Expence of the other, pretend that *Dido* is the Copy of *Calippo*; that *Aeneas* is sent to the Shades after *Ulysses*, and the like. Let the Readers compare those pretended Copies with

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the suppos'd Original, they will find a wonderful Difference.

The Passion of *Dido*, her Misfortune, her Death, brought in as the Cause of that everlasting Hatred between *Carthage* and *Rome*; and *Anchises* calling forth from the Womb of Time, the Fate of the *Roman* Empire; all these Beauties are not certainly owing to *Homer*.

It is not in the Nature of a Genius to be a Copyist. Wherever *Virgil* is great, he is himself; but in those little Passages borrow'd from *Homer*, he commonly falls short of the Original: and 'tis a just Punishment for having clogg'd the Liberty of his Genius with the Fetters of Imitation.

Some Criticks proceed further. They tell us, *Virgil* has copied his second Book from *Pisander*, and the fourth after *Apollonius*.

If he has stolen from them, then he hath not robb'd *Homer*. But all that ought to be flatly deny'd; and the only Answer which is to be made to such Discoveries, is, that the second and fourth Book of *Virgil*, are too great Master-pieces of Art to be but Copies.

'Tis just as some People say *Milton* hath stolen his Poem from an *Italian* Stroller call'd *Andreino*.

And after all, what avails such a trifling Enquiry? 'Tis not the Person of *Virgil*, 'tis the *Æneid* which we admire: let the second and the fourth Book belong to *Pisander*, to *Apollonius*, or to *Virgil*, or to any body else, the Name of the Author does not alter the Beauties of the Book. Let *Macrobius* and other Criticks, detract from the six Letters which make up the Name of *Virgil*; his Works will nevertheless be the Delight of all Ages, and the Pattern of all Poets.

Another Objection against him, is, that he hath not crowd'd in his Poems so many Heroes as *Homer* hath done. That *Ajax*, *Diomedes*, *Idomeneus*,

Sec. are all shining Characters; whereas the faithful *Achates*, the strong *Gias*, and the magnanimous *Chloanthus*, are of no manner of Use, and serve only but to fill now and then the Gap of a Verse or two.

I am apt to think, that such an Objection turns a great deal to the Advantage of the *Æneid*: *Virgil* sung the Actions of *Æneas*, and *Homer* the Idleness of *Achilles*.

The *Greek* Poet lay under the Necessity of supplying the Absence of his first *Hero*, with some other Warriors; but what was judicious in *Homer*, would have been preposterous in *Virgil*: He knew too much of his Art, to drown his principal Character in the Croud of many other Heroes, indifferent to the main Action.

Thus he found the Way to center our Concern in *Æneas*; he interests us for him, by never losing sight of him, while *Homer* presenting us with the shifting Scene of so many shining Characters, interests us for none.

Mr. De St. Evremont says, *Æneas* is fitter to be the Founder of an Order of Monks, than of an Empire. 'Tis true, *Æneas* hath the misfortune to pass generally under the Notion of a pious Man, and not a great Warrior; the Fault is not in *Virgil*, it lies in the wrong Notions which the Generality of Mankind entertains of Courage. Our Eyes are dazzl'd with the boisterous Fury of a wild Hero. Had *Virgil* been less wise, had the Courage of *Æneas* been a barbarous Rashness, instead of a sedate and calmly-daring Valour, perhaps he might please better, but surely he would deserve it less.

It is a just Criticism on *Virgil*, that the latter Part of his Poem is less animated than the first; not that the six last Books are entirely languishing, but their milder Light is overpowered by the Lustre of the others.

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That great Defect is owing to the Disposition of the Poem, and to the Nature of the Things. The Design of a Match between *Aeneas* and *Lavinia* unknown and indifferent to each other, and a War rais'd about a Stag wounded by a young Boy, could not indeed command our Concern as well as the burning of *Troy*, and the Love of *Dido*.

'Tis a great Mistake to believe an Author can soar, when the Subject sinks. All the Art he employs, shows only that he till'd with Labour and Skill an ungrateful Soil. If the natural Chain of Events in the *Aeneid* could have allow'd *Virgil* to rise by Degrees in point of Sentiments and Grandeur; his Poem had been as unexceptionable as the Bounds of human Talent will permit. In short, his Fault lies in having reach'd to the utmost Pitch of the Art in the middle of his Course.

LUCAN.

AFTER we have lifted up our Eyes towards *Virgil*, and *Homer*, we need not look down on the other *Roman* Authors who have been stumbling in the same Carrier. Let us lay aside their mean and monstrous Mimicks, *Statius* and *Silius Italicus*; but we ought not to overlook *Lucan*, who took entirely a new Course, and whose free Genius borrow'd neither its Beauties nor its Faults.

He was of an antient equestrian Family, born at *Condeva* in *Spain* under *Caligula*; he was brought to *Rome* when eight Months old, and educated there, under the Influence of his Uncle *Seneca*, with the nice Care that his Birth, his opulent Fortune, and especially the Pregnancy of his early Genius deserved. I mention this, only to silence those Criticks who have call'd in question the Purity of his Language; they took him for a *Spaniard*, who
wrote

wrote *Roman* Verses; and prepossess'd with that Notion, they fancied they discover'd in his Language, some Faults which do not really exist; and which if they did exist, could not be perceiv'd by any Modern.

He was at first a Favourite to *Nero*, till he had the noble Imprudence to contend with him for the Prize of Poetry, and the dangerous Honour of carrying it.

He praised that Emperor in his *Pharsalia*, while *Nero* was yet the Delight of the Empire; he conspir'd against him, when the Emperor became a Tyrant. All the World knows he was sentenced to die; and the Choice of the manner of his Death being left to him, he chose to have the Veins of his Arms and Legs open'd in a hot Bath; and died with that Tranquillity, which in those Moments is the true Greatness of Soul.

He was not the first who thought a recent History the proper Subject of an *Epick* Poem, for *Varius* had ventur'd before him (and with Success) on such a dangerous Undertaking.

The Proximity of the Times and the Notoriety of the Events which he took for his Theme, were certainly a great Clog to his Poetical Invention, (if he had any.)

The greater his Subject was, the greater the Difficulty. *Cæsar* and *Pompey* were no doubt Men of higher Importance than *Agamemnon*, or *Æneas*; and the War wag'd before the Walls of *Troy* and before *Latium*, were but Frays of Children in comparison of the *Roman* Civil War, in which the greatest Men of *Rome* fought for the Empire of the World.

Lucan could hardly give any Scope to his Imagination on a Subject so well known, and with more Difficulty come up to its Grandeur. On these accounts the Frame of his Poem is dry and tedious, because

cause he dares not deviate from the History; and his Style swells too often into *Fustian*, when he endeavours to raise it to the Actions of his Heroes.

So *Aeneas* and *Achilles*, who were inconsiderable in themselves, are for ever great in *Homer* and *Virgil*: While *Caesar* and *Pompey*, sink under the Bombast of *Lucan*. 'Tis a great pity that the Pictures of his Heroes being drawn with such masterly Strokes, their Actions are so little affecting.

Nothing is more beautiful than the Character of *Cato*, of *Caesar*, and of *Pompey*, but nothing more languishing than the part which they act. *Lucan* with all the Force of his Painting, with his Grandeur, with his Wit, with his political Notions, is but a declamatory Gazetteer: Sublime here and there, faulty through all the Work.

He is to be commended for having laid the Gods aside, as much as *Homer* and *Virgil* for having made use of that Machinery. Those Fables were adapted to the dark fabulous Ages in which *Priam* and *Latinus* liv'd, but no way suitable to the Wars of *Rome*. What brightens the Character of *Aeneas*, and confers a Majesty on the inconsiderable Beginnings of *Rome*, would have debas'd the Character of *Caesar*, and drawn a Ridicule upon him. What a poor Figure would that Conqueror make in the Field of *Pharsalia*, should he be assisted by *Iris* or by *Mercury*?

It methinks that shows evidently that the Intervention of the Gods is not absolutely requir'd in an *Epick* Poem. They are so far from being necessary, that the best Passage of *Lucan* (and perhaps of all the Poets) is the Speech of *Cato* in the Ninth Book, when he scorns to consult *Jupiter*. 'Tis not for want of Gods, but for want of managing with Art the Affairs of Men, that *Lucan* is inferior to *Virgil*.

The Judgment of the World is justly pass'd upon him. He is look'd upon as a strong Genius, tho' not

as a good Poet; and the precious Stones which shine in the *Pharsalia*, (tho' ill set,) yet dazzle and shine in our Eyes. Monsieur de *Corneille* was us'd to say, that he was more indebted to *Lucan* than to *Virgil*. Not that he was so unjust, and of so injudicious a Taste as to prefer the *Pharsalia* to the *Aeneid*. But an Author who brings real Heroes upon the Stage, has but little to do with Poetical Fictions, and will be better help'd by the vigorous Thoughts of *Lucan*, than by the elegant Narration of *Virgil*. Mr. *Addison* borrowed from the *Pharsalia* some Strokes, in the drawing of his *Cato*. That Antient Poet never received a greater Honour than when he was imitated by Mr. de *Corneille* and by Mr. *Addison*, two Men every way superior to him.

TRISSINO.

After the Fall of the *Roman* Empire in the *West*; several Kingdoms rose out of its Ruins, and many Languages were form'd out of the remains of the *Latin* Tongue. The *Northern* Invaders brought every where their Roughness and their Ignorance. Their Language made up at first of a corrupted *Latin*, and of irregular *Gothick*, was as uncouth as their Manners, and as destitute of Words as their Minds of *Ideas*.

In the Course of a thousand Years the *Italians*, the *French*, the *Spaniards*, refin'd their Manners and their Idioms. And Learning spreading itself by degrees almost over all *Europe*, enlarg'd the Sphere of every Language.

Many Writers complain now-a-days, that the *Latin* is us'd only in the Schools, and in the *Romish* Churches; they upbraid the Insufficiency of modern Languages; they say that their own Idioms sink under their Imagination. But they would have more
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to complain of, if according to their Desires the *Latin* was still the Language of *Europe*; for in that Case, very little Room would be left for their Labours. A Multitude of antient Authors more generally read, and better understood, would shut up all the Avenues to the Ambition of the modern. To imitate *Virgil* or *Tully*, would be a Plagiarism; to deviate from them, an Affectation; the World overstock'd with Models of Writing would discountenance any new Endeavour, and the greatest Genius would be discouraged.

On the contrary, he who writes in a modern Language, hath the Antients for his Guides, not for his Rivals; when he imitates them, he enriches his own Country; the particular Cast of his Mother-tongue awakens his Imagination into new Turns, and bestows an Air of Novelty on some Conceptions which otherwise would have appear'd too common. In short, every new Language occasions some new Productions.

The *Italian* Tongue was at the end of the fifteenth Century brought to the Perfection, in which it continues now, and in which it will remain as long as *Tasso* in Poetry, and *Machiavel* in Prose shall be the Standard of the Stile.

Tasso was in his Childhood, when *Trissino* (the Author of the first Tragedy written in a modern Language) launch'd out into the Attempt of an *Epick* Poem. His Subject was *Italy* deliver'd from the *Goths* by *Belizarius* under *Justinian*. The Subject was noble, the Performance was mean, but still succeeded; and this Dawning shone a little in a time of Darkness, till it was absorb'd in the broad Day of *Tasso*.

Trissino was a Man of great Parts, and of extensive Learning; he was employ'd by *Leo* the Tenth in many great Affairs, and had succeeded very well in his Embassy to the Emperor *Charles* the Fifth.

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But at last he sacrificed his Ambition, and worldly Affairs, to his Passion for Letters, which at that Time were reputed honourable, because they were newly reviv'd in *Europe*, and in the Glory of their Prime. He was justly fond of *Homer*, and yet his great Fault is to have imitated him; for Imitation requires more Art than is generally believed. The Flowers of the Ancients appear but wither'd, when gather'd by unskilful Hands. This I insist upon, because nothing is more common than Authors who mangle *Homer* and *Virgil* in their own Productions, and screen themselves under those great Names, without suspecting that the very Things, which are to be admired in *Virgil*, may be ridiculous in them.

Thus *Trissino*, for Example, endeavours to imitate that beautiful Passage of *Homer*, where *Juno* having summon'd all her Charms, and adorn'd with the Girdle of *Venus*, deludes her Husband into an unusual Fondness.

The Wife of *Justinian* hath the same Design upon her Husband. First she washes herself in her fine Closet, she puts on a clean Shift; and after the long enumeration of all the Trinkets of her Toilette, she comes alone into a little Garden where the Emperor was sitting down: She coins a Lye, she allures him by some Coquettries, and at last the Emperor——

Le Diede un Bacio

Suave; é, le getto le braccia all collo.

E ella stette e sorridendo disse.

Signor mio dolce hor che volete fare?

Che se venisse alguno in questo luogo

E ci vedesse, havrei tanta vergogna

Che più non ardirei levar la fronte:

Entriamo nelle nostre usate stanze,

Chiudamo li usci, e sopra il vostro letto

Ponianci,

Ponianci, e fate poi, quel che vi piace.
 L'imperador rispose; alma mia vita,
 Non dubitate dela vista altrui:
 Che qui non puo venir persona humana,
 Senon per la mia Stanza. E io la chiusi
 Come qui venni, e ho la chiave a canto;
 E penso che ancor vi chiudeste l'uscio
 Che vien in esso dele Stanze vostre;
 Perche giamai non lo lasciaste aperto:
 E detto questo, subito abbraciolla;
 Poi se colcar ne la minuta herbetta,
 La quale allegra lii fioriva d'intorno, &c.

" The Emperor gave her a Kiss, and folded her
 " tenderly in his Arms. She paused a little, and
 " said, O my sweet Lord, what will you do?
 " should any body come hither and spy us, I
 " could never show my Face for shame: Let us
 " step into our Bed-chamber, let us lock up all the
 " Doors; and when we are together upon our
 " Bed, you may do with me what you please. The
 " Emperor answer'd, My Dear! my Soul! do not
 " lie under any fear of being discovered; for not
 " one living Soul can arrive at us but through my
 " Chamber: I took care to shut the Door as I
 " came hither, and I have the Key in my Pocket.
 " I suppose too you have the Key of the Back-
 " door which opens from your Apartment into
 " mine, for you never leave it open; he said, and
 " hugged her. The tender Grass on which they
 " dallied, rejoiced at their Pleasures, and shot forth
 " into tender Flowers."

Thus what is beautiful and noble between *Jove*
 and *Juno*, becomes as low and as distasteful be-
 tween the old *Justinian* and *Theodora*; as when
 among us, a Man and Wife carels one another be-
 fore Company.

Trissino

Trissino hath especially endeavour'd to follow *Homer* in the Detail of the Descriptions; but he is very accurate in describing the Furniture of the Houses of his Heroes: He does not omit a Button or a Garter in their Dresses; and does not say a Word of their Characters.

However, I do not mention him only to point out his Faults, but to give him the just Praises he deserves; for having been the first in *Europe* who attempted an *Epick* Poem in a vulgar Tongue, and in Blank Verse; for not having been guilty of a single Quibble in his Works, though he was an *Italian*; and for having introduc'd less Magicians, and fewer enchanted Heroes, than any Author of his Nation.

CAMOUENS:

WHILE *Trissino* was clearing away the Rubbish in *Italy*, which Barbarity and Ignorance had heap'd up for ten Centuries, in the Way of the Arts and Sciences; *Camouens* in *Portugal* steer'd a new Course, and acquir'd a Reputation which lasts still among his Countrymen, who pay as much Respect to his Memory, as the *English* to *Milton*.

He was a strong Instance of the irresistible Impulse of Nature, which determines a true Genius to follow the Bent of his Talents, in spite of all the Obstacles which could check his Course.

His Infancy lost amidst the Idleness and Ignorance of the Court of *Lisbon*; his Youth spent in romantic Loves, or in the War against the *Moors*; his long Voyages at Sea, in his riper Years; his Misfortunes at Court; the Revolutions of his Country; none of all these could suppress his Genius.

Emanuel the second King of *Portugal*, having a mind to find a new Way to the *East-Indies* by the Ocean,

Ocean, sent *Velasco de Gama* with a Fleet, in the Year 1497, to that Undertaking; which being new, was accounted rash and impracticable, and which of course gain'd him a great Reputation when it succeeded.

Camouens follow'd *Velasco de Gama* in that dangerous Voyage, led by his Friendship to him, and by a noble Curiosity, which seldom fails to be the Character of Men born with a great Imagination.

He took his Voyage for the Subject of his Poem. He enjoy'd the sensible Pleasure, which no body had known before him, to celebrate his Friend, and the Things which he was an Eye-witness of. He wrote his Poem, part on the *Atlantic Sea*, and part on the *Indian Shore*. I ought not to omit, that in a Shipwreck on the Coasts of *Malabar*, he swam a-shore, holding up his Poem in one Hand, which otherwise had been perhaps lost for ever.

Such a new Subject, manag'd by an uncommon Genius, could not but produce a Sort of *Epick* Poetry unheard of before.

There no bloody Wars are fought, no Heroes wounded in a thousand different ways; no Woman enticed away, and the World over-turn'd for her Cause; no Empire founded; in short, nothing of what was deem'd before, the only Subject of Poetry.

The Poet conducts the *Portuguese* Fleet to the Mouth of the *Ganges*, round the Coasts of *Africk*. He takes notice in the way, of many Nations who live upon the *African* Shore. He interweaves artfully, the History of *Portugal*. The Simplicity of his Subject, is rais'd by some Fictions of different Kinds, which I think not improper to acquaint the Reader with.

When the Fleet is sailing in the sight of the *Cape of Good Hope*, call'd then the *Cape of the Storms*, a formidable Shape appears to them, walking in the

the Depth of the Sea; his Head reaches to the Clouds, the Storms, the Winds, the Thunders, and the Lightenings hang about him; his Arms are extended over the Waves. 'Tis the Guardian of that foreign Ocean unplough'd before by any Ship. He complains of his being oblig'd to submit to Fate, and to the audacious Undertaking of the *Portuguese*, and foretels them all the Misfortunes which they must undergo in the *Indies*.

I believe, that such a Fiction would be thought noble and proper, in all Ages, and in all Nations.

There is another, which perhaps would have pleas'd the *Italians* as well as the *Portuguese*, but no other Nation besides: It is an enchanted Island, call'd the Island of Bliss, which the Fleet finds in her way home, just rising from the Sea, for their Comfort, and for their Reward: *Camouens* describes that Place, as *Tasso* did some Years after, his Island of *Armida*. There a supernatural Power brings in all the Beauties, and presents all the Pleasures which Nature can afford, and which the Heart may wish for; a Goddess enamour'd with *Velasco de Gama*, carries him to the Top of an high Mountain, from whence she shows him all the Kingdoms of the Earth, and foretels the Fate of *Portugal*.

After *Camouens* hath given a loose to his Fancy, in the lascivious Description of the Pleasures which *Gama* and his Crew enjoy'd in the Island; he takes care to inform the Reader, that he ought to understand by this Fiction, nothing but the Satisfaction which the virtuous Man feels, and the Glory which accrues to him by the Practice of Virtue: But the best Excuse for such an Invention, is, the charming Style in which it is deliver'd (if we believe the *Portuguese*) for the Beauty of the Elocution makes sometimes amends for the Faults of the Poets,

Poets, as the Colouring of *Rubens* makes some Defects in his Figures pass unregarded.

There is another kind of *Machinery* continued throughout all the Poem, which nothing can excuse, in any Country whatever: 'tis an injudicious Mixture of the Heathen Gods with our Religion. *Gama* in a Storm addresses his Prayers to *Christ*, but 'tis *Venus* who comes to his Relief; the Heroes are *Christians*, and the Poet *Heathen*. The main Design which the *Portuguese* are suppos'd to have (next to the promoting of their Trade) is to propagate *Christianity*; yet *Jupiter*, *Bacchus*, and *Venus*, have in their hands, all the Management of the Voyage. So incongruous a *Machinery*, casts a Blemish upon the whole Poem; yet shows at the same time, how prevailing are its Beauties, since the *Portuguese* like it with all its Faults.

Camouens hath a great deal of true Wit, and not a little Share of false; his Imagination hurries him into great Absurdities.

I remember, that after *Velasco de Gama* hath related his Adventures to the King of *Melinda*; Now, says he, O King, judge if *Ulysses*, and *Aeneas*, have travel'd so far, and undergone so many Hardships. As if that barbarous *African* was acquainted with *Homer* and *Virgil*.

His Poem, in my Opinion, is full of numberless Faults and Beauties, thick sown near one another; and almost in every Page, there is what to laugh at, and what to be delighted with. Among his most lucky Thoughts, I must take notice of two for the likeness which they bear to two most celebrated Passages of *Waller* and *Sir John Denham*.

Waller says in his Epistle to *Zelinda*,
 Thy matchless Form will Credit bring,
 To all the Wonders I can sing.

Camouens says, in speaking of the Voyages of the *Argonauts*, and of *Ulysses*, that the Undertaking of the *Portuguese* shall give Credit to all those Fables, in surpassing them.

Sir *John Denham*, in his Poem on *Coopers-Hill*, says to the *Thames*;

O could I flow like thee, and make thy Stream,
My great Example, as it is my Theme;
Tho' deep, yet clear; tho' gentle, yet not dull;
Strong, without Rage; without overflowing, full.

Camouens addresses the Nymphs of *Tagus* in the like Manner; "O Nymphs, if ever I sung of you, inspire me now with new and strong Lays; let my Style flow like your Waves; let it be deep and clear, as your Waters, &c."

It is not to be infer'd from thence, that *Waller* and Sir *John Denham* have imitated *Camouens*; we must only conclude, that Wit is of the Growth of every Country. It is very unjust, and very common, to call Plagiarism what is but Resemblance.

TASSO.

TORQUATO *Tasso* began his *Jerusalem*, when *Camouens* was finishing his *Lusiada*. He us'd to say, that the only Rival he fear'd in *Europe* was *Camouens*. His fear (if sincere) was very ill-grounded; for he was as far superior to him, as that *Portuguese* excell'd the Poets of his own Country.

No Man in the World was ever born with a greater Genius, and more qualify'd for *Epick* Poetry. His Talents which gain'd him so great a Reputation, were the Cause of his Misfortunes. His Life prov'd a Chain of Miseries and Woes. Banish'd from

from his own Country, he was reduced to the grievous Necessity of having a Patron. He suffered Want, Exile, and Prison; and which is more intolerable, he was oppressed by Calumny.

Even his poetical Glory, that chimerical Comfort in real Calamities, was contested. The Number of his Enemies eclipsed for a long while his Reputation: And at last, when his Merit began to overcome Envy, when he was ready to receive the Honour of Triumph in *Rome*, which *Petrarch* had formerly enjoyed (though with less Merit) and which was at that time as glorious as it is now ridiculous; he died the very Day before the designed Solemnity.

Nothing discovers more plainly the high Sense which *Rome* entertained of his Merit, than the Inscription on his Tomb.

The Pope, who ordered him a magnificent Funeral, as if it were to atone for the Misfortunes of his Life, proposed a Reward for the best Epitaph which should be written in his Honour.

Many were brought to him, all full of the just Praises of *Tasso*. The Judges appointed to chuse the Epitaph, were divided in their Opinions, when a young Man came to them with this Inscription,

Torquati Tassi ossa.

The Judges immediately agreed in giving the Preference to it, being persuaded, that the Name of *Tasso* was his greatest Encomium.

Time, which undermines the Reputation of indifferent Authors, hath stamp'd the Character of Immortality upon his Works. His Poem is sung now-a-days in many Parts of *Italy*, as the Poems of *Homer* were in *Greece*; and if the Poets, his Successors, have degenerated from him, if *Italy* is now overgrown with pitiful Sonnets and Conceits; still the Taste of the Nation form'd after his Poems, re-

mains in its full force: He is admir'd by the Readers, though not imitated by the Writers. Thus in France, *Corneille*, *Racine*, *Boileau*, *la Fontaine*, *Moliere*, will claim for ever the publick Admiration, in defiance to a succeeding Set of Writers, who have introduc'd a new-fangl'd Stile, kept up and cherish'd among themselves, but despis'd by the Nation.

The *Jerusalem Liberata*, is in some Parts an Imitation of the *Iliad*. The Subject of *Tasso*, is nobler than that of *Homer*; in as much as all *Europe*, rising up in Arms for the Recovery of the Land which is consecrated by the Birth and Blood of their God, strikes the Mind with a more awful Idea, than *Greece* fighting against *Troy*, for *Helena*.

As to the Disposition of so great a Work, the impartial Reader may judge if *Tasso* is above, or under his Master, in what he copies from him.

Goffredo acts methinks the Part of *Agamemnon*, with as much Grandeur, less Pride, and more Wisdom.

The Hermit *Piero* is the *Calcas*; and if I dare speak my Opinion, I find nothing very shining nor defective in either.

Rinaldo is among the Christian Princes, what *Achilles* is among the Grecian Heroes. His Courage is full as boisterous, but his Character more amiable. The Fall of *Jerusalem* is reserv'd to his Sword, as that of *Troy* to the Arms of *Achilles*. The Absence of the one from the Camp, is borrow'd from the Inaction of the other; but certainly *Rinaldo* employs his Leisure more to the Satisfaction of the Reader, than the Hero of *Homer* does.

Aladino, Sultan of *Jerusalem*, is in nothing like *Priam*, but in his being the King of the Town besieged; and *Argante* bears no other resemblance to *Hector*, but in his being the firmest Bulwark of the City.

Certainly

Certainly the Character of *Hector* is every way above that of *Argante*, and the Grandeur of *Priam* more majestick, and his Misfortunes more touching than those of *Aladino*. I will not decide, if *Homer* hath done right or wrong, in gaining upon our Affections towards *Hector*, and in moving our Pity for *Priam*; but sure it is, that if *Tasso* had not represented *Aladin* and *Argante* rough and unamiable, if he had not skilfully created an Aversion to them, in the Mind of the Reader, he had defeated his own Intention; for in that Case, instead of being concerned for the Cause of the *Christian* Princes, we should look upon them as Plunderers, united together to lay waste a foreign Country, and to massacre in cold Blood, an old venerable *Eastern* Monarch, together with his innocent Subjects.

Tasso hath learned from *Homer*, the Art of marking the different *Shades* of the same Colour, I mean the different *Kinds* of the same *Virtue*; of distinguishing the *Valiant* from the *Valiant*, and the *Prudent* from the *Prudent*, &c. Thus *Goffredo* is sedate and wise, *Aladin* anxious and cruel. The generous Valour of *Tancrede*, shines in opposition to the brutal Impetuosity of *Argante*. Love in *Armida* is a Mixture of Coquetry and Rage, in *Herminia* a gentle Tenderness. Every one of his Actors is to be known by some distinguishable Mark, as in the *Iliad*, and every one of them acts always suitable to his Character, which is not always to be found in *Homer*; and in that respect methinks he hath improved the Art which *Homer* taught him; but an Art which he learned from no body. 'Tis that enchanting way of interesting us for his Heroes, 'tis that inexpressible Address in interweaving the different Adventures of the Poem, in leading us from the Alarms of Wars to the Allurements of Love, and from Love to War again; in working up our

Concern by degrees, and in rising above himself from Book to Book.

As to his Style, it is perspicuous and elegant through all the Poem; and when he enters into Descriptions which require Strength and Majesty, it is wonderful how the natural Effeminacy of the *Italian* Language soars up into Sublimity and Grandeur, and assumes a new Character in his hands, if we except about a hundred Lines, in which he flattens into pitiful Conceits. But I look on these Errors as a kind of Tribute, which his Genius condescended to pay to the *Italian* Taste.

If his Excellencies challenge the unanimous Admiration of *Europe*, there are Faults in him which methinks are censured every where. The Episode of *Olindo* and *Sophronia* in the beginning of the Action, seems defective in all respects.

The Poet introduces a *Mahometan* Magician, called *Ismeno*, who against the strict and never violated Laws of the *Mahometan* Religion, carries an Image of the Virgin *Mary* into the principal *Mosque*, in order to make it, by the Force of his Enchantments, the Pledge and Security of the Town, as formerly the Fate of *Troy* depended upon the *Palladium*. It happens one Night that the Image is stolen away; the Christians of *Jerusalem* being suspected of the Theft, the *Sultan* incensed, sentences them all to death, that he might be sure to punish the guilty in the common Slaughter. Mean while *Sophronia*, a pious Christian Virgin, comes before the *Sultan*; she saves her Countrymen by a generous Lye; she declares that she hath stolen the Image. The King condemns her to be burnt. *Olindo* her Lover endeavours to save her Life by another noble Lye; he takes the Guilt upon himself, and claims the Pile prepared for her. At last both are sentenced to die, both are tied to the same Stake; when of a sudden arrives *Clorinda* from *Persia*.

Persia. She, moved with Pity towards them, and looking with Scorn upon the Sorcery of *Ismeno*, asks and obtains their Pardon. *Olindo* and *Sophronia* go from the Pile to their Church, marry, and are no more heard of in the Poem.

Tasso adorned that useless Episode with all the Pomp of Poetry, nay, he is not sparing of *Italian* Conceits in it. He dwells with so much Complacency upon the Description of *Sophronia*, he speaks of the Love of *Olindo* with so much Warmth, he excites so much Pity from them both, that every Reader cannot but believe that both are principal Characters in the Poem. He is amazed and angry afterwards to see them as useless to the Affairs of the Christians, as the Image of the Virgin *Mary* to the Infidels. All the Embellishments which *Tasso* lavishes upon such a needless Piece of Enchantment, and upon so preposterous an Episode, serve but to render the Fault more conspicuous.

All the World owns with the *Italians*, that nothing is so artfully described as the Coquettry of *Armida*, nothing so tender as her Love, nothing so animated and so moving as her Complaints. The Taste of the *English* and of the *French*, tho' averse to any Machinery grounded upon Enchantment, must forgive, nay commend that of *Armida*, since it is the Source of so many Beauties. Besides, she is a *Mahometan*, and the Christian Religion allows us to believe that those Infidels are under the immediate Influence of the Devil.

But indeed no body but an *Italian* can bear with the wild excess, to which *Tasso* hath carried that Machinery. Ten Christian Princes turn'd into Fish in the Ponds of *Armida*, and a Parrot singing amorous Songs of his own making, are very strange things in the eyes of a serious Reader, tho' one is preceded by the Story of *Circe* in *Homer*; and tho'

tho' the Parrots are thought among us to mimick now and then human Voices.

Still we should easily forgive such poetical Extravagancies for the sake of the Beauties which are mingled with them. Let the Devils (since they are admitted) have a free scope to play their wild pranks, especially in *Italy*, where the Superstition of the People brings credit to no less strange Tales.

But it is unaccountable how Men of Sense can approve of the Christian Magicians, who help *Rinaldo* out of the hands of the *Mahometan* Wizards. It is singular to see in *Tasso* Lewdness, Mafs, Confession, the Litanies of the Saints, and pieces of Witchcraft heap'd together.

What strange Fancy! to send *Ubaldo* and his Companion to an old *holy Conjuror*, who carries them *just into the Center of the Earth*. The two Knights walk there on the Banks of a Rivulet cover'd with precious Stones of all kinds. From that place they are sent to *Ascalon* to an old Woman, who carries them swiftly in a little Ship to the *Canary* Islands. Thither they arrive in the Name of God, holding in their hands a magick Wand; they perform their Ambassy; they carry *Rinaldo* back with them to the Camp of the Christians, for the Army was in need of him. But what was the great Exploit which must necessarily be perform'd by *Rinaldo*, and by him only?

He was destin'd by Providence, and brought by Enchantment from the Pic of *Teneriff* to *Jerusalem*, in order to cut down some Trees in a Forest inhabited by Elves and Hobgoblins. That Forest is the great Machinery of *Tasso*. It is remarkable, that in the former Books God Almighty orders his Archangel *Michael* to drive down into Hell the Devils who were let loose in the Air, raising Storms, and managing his Thunders against the Christians, in favour of the *Mahometans*. *Michael* forbids

forbids them strictly to meddle any more in those Affairs. They obey, and plunge into Hell immediately; but soon after the Enchanter *Ismeno* recalls them out, they find means to elude the Orders of God, and under the pretence of some *Jesuitical* Distinctions, they take possession of the Forest; wherein the Christians intended to provide the Timber necessary to build a wooden Tower.

There they assume innumerable Shapes to frighten away those who come to cut the Trees. There *Tancred* finds his *Clorinda* after her death shut up in a Pine, and bleeding for the blow which he strikes at the Root. There *Armida* peeps out of a Myrtle, while she is some Miles off, in the *Egyptian* Army, and totally unappriz'd of her being in two places at once, tho' she is the best Sorceress in the World. At last the Prayers of the *Hermit*, and the Merit of *Rinaldo's* Contrition after his Confession, break the Enchantment.

Methinks it is not very foreign to the purpose, to see how differently *Lucan* hath handled in his *Pharsalia* a Topick pretty much of the same nature. 'Tis when *Cæsar* orders his Troops to cut down some Trees in the sacred Forest of *Marseilles*, to have them made into warlike Instruments. The Passage deserves to be set in its full length, as it is translated by the late Mr. Rowe.

Not far away, for Ages past had stood
An old inviolated sacred Wood;
Whose gloomy Boughs, thick interwoven, made
A chilly, chearless, everlasting Shade;
There, nor the rustick Gods, nor Satyrs sport,
Nor Fauns and Sylvans with the Nymphs resort:
But barb'rous Priests some dreadful Pow'r adore,
And lustrate every Tree with human Gore.
If Mysteries in times of old receiv'd,
And pious Ancientry be yet believ'd,

There

There nor the feather'd Songster builds her Nest,
 Nor lonely Dens conceal the savage Beast:
 There no tempestuous Winds presume to fly,
 Ev'n Lightnings glance aloof, and shoot obliquely by;
 No wanton Breezes toss'd the dancing Leaves,
 But shiv'ring Horror in the Branches heaves.
 Black Springs, with pitchy Streams, divide the Ground,
 And bubbling, tumble with a sullen sound.
 Old Images of Forms mis-shapen stand,
 Rude and unknowing of the Artist's hand;
 With hoary Filth begrim'd, each ghastly Head
 Strikes the astonish'd Gazer's Soul with dread.
 No Gods, who long in common shapes appear'd,
 Were e'er with such religious Awe rever'd:
 But zealous Crouds in ignorance adore;
 And still the less they know, they fear the more.
 The pious Worshippers approach not near,
 But shun their Gods, and kneel with distant fear:
 The Priest himself, when, or the Day, or Night,
 Rowling, have reach'd their full meridian Height,
 Refrains the gloomy Paths with wary Feet,
 Dreading the Dæmon of the Grove to meet;
 Who, terrible to sight, at that fix'd hour,
 Still treads the ground about his dreery Bow'r.

This Wood near neighb'ring to th' encompass'd Town,
 Untouch'd by former Wars remain'd alone;
 And since the Country round it naked stands,
 From hence the Latian Chief Supplies demands.
 But lo! the bolder Hands, that should have struck,
 With some unusual horror trembling shook;
 With silent dread and reverence they survey'd
 The gloom majestick of the sacred Shade:
 None dares with impious Steel the Bark to rend,
 Lest on himself the destin'd stroke descend.
 Cæsar perceiv'd the spreading fear to grow,
 Then eager, caught an Axe, and aim'd a blow:
 Deep sunk within a violated Oak
 The wounding edge, and thus the Warrior spoke.

Now,

Now, let no doubting Hand the Task decline :
 Cut you the Wood, and let the guilt be mine.
 The trembling Bands unwillingly obey'd ;
 Two various Ills were in the Balance laid,
 And Cæsar's Wrath against the Gods was weigh'd. }

I confess that the whole *Pharsalia* is not to be compared to the *Jerusalem* of *Tasso*. But at least that particular Passage shows how the true Grandeur of a real Hero is above the *romantick* ; and how solid and strong Thoughts excel those Inventions, which the Croud calls poetical Beauties, and on which wise Men look down as Tales fit for Children.

The *Virtuosi* in *Italy* have disputed for a long while, and still contest which of the two, *Ariosto* or *Tasso*, deserves the Precedency. But every where else, the chiefest Exception that Men of Understanding take to *Tasso*, is that of having too much of *Ariosto* in him. *Tasso* seems to have been conscious of this fault. He could not be unsensible that such wild fairy Tales, at that time so much in fashion not in *Italy* only, but in all *Europe*, were altogether inconsistent with the gravity of *Epick* Poetry. In order to cover this Defect, he printed a Preface, in which he pretends all his Poem is but a Shadow and a Type.

The Army of the Christian Princes, says he, represents the Body and the Soul. *Jerusalem* the Figure of true Happiness, which cannot be obtain'd but by Labour and Difficulties. *Goffredo* is the Mind, *Tancredo*, *Raimondo*, &c. are the Faculties of the Mind. The common Soldiers make up the Limbs of the Body. The Devils are at once figur'd, and Figures, (*figura è figurato.*) *Armida* and *Ismeno* are the Temptations which besiege our Souls. The Spells and the Illusions of the enchanted Forest, shadow out the false Reasoning, (*falsi sillogismi*)

fillogismi) into which our Passions are apt to mislead us.

Such is the Key that *Tasso* thinks fit to give us of his Works. He deals with himself, as the Commentators have done with *Homer* and *Virgil*. Those Gentlemen, are like speculative and dully wise Politicians, who construe the most insignificant Actions of great Men, into designs of the greatest depth and importance. But *Tasso* was like that Ambassador, who having spent all the time of his Embassy in Debauchery and Riot, wrote to his Master, that he was whoring and drinking for the Service of his Majesty.

However, the ridiculous Explanation which *Tasso* gives with so much gravity of his Extravagancies, cannot impose upon Mankind : For we no more allow an Author to comment upon himself, than a Priest to prophesy of himself.

If the Devils act in *Tasso* the insipid part of despicable Jugglers, on the other hand, what is relating to Religion, is writ with majesty, and, I dare say, in the spirit of Religion itself. Nay, Processions and Litanies, and all the parts of *Papish* Religion, which are accounted comical and mean in *England*, appear in a reverend awfulness in that Poem. So prevalent is the Art of Poetry, when it exerts itself in its full force, and so peculiar to it is the power of raising what is low, and of enlarging the Sphere of all things.

He is guilty of indulging the inaccurate Custom of calling the evil Spirits by the Names of *Pluto*, *Alceto*; and of mingling often *Pagan* Ideas with *Christian* Mythology. 'Tis strange that none of the modern Poets are free from that Fault. It seems that our Devils, and our Christian Hell, have something in them low and mean, and must be rais'd by the Hell of the *Pagans*, which owes its Dignity to its Antiquity. Certain it is, that the Hell of the Gospel

Gospel is not so fitted for Poetry, as that of *Homer* and *Virgil*. The Name of *Tisiphone* sounds better than that of *Beelzebub*; but with all that, it is as preposterous in a Poet to bring *Michael* and *Alecco* together, as in some *Italian* and *Flemish* Painters to have represented the Virgin *Mary* with a *Chapelet* of Beads hanging at her Girdle; to have plac'd some *Swiss* Guards at the Door of the Apartment of *Pharaoh*; and to have mix'd Cannons and Carabines with the ancient Arrows in the Battle of *Joshua*.

Don Alonzo d'Ereilla y Cuniga.

AT the end of the sixteenth Century, *Spain* produc'd an *Epick* Poem, famous for some peculiar Beauties that shine in it, as well as for the singularity of its Subject; but still more illustrious by the Character of the Author.

Alonzo of *Ereilla y Cuniga*, Gentleman of the Bed-Chamber to the Emperor *Maximilian*, was bred up in the House of *Philip* the Second, and fought under his Orders, at the Battle of *St. Quintin*, where the *French* were utterly defeated.

Philip, after such a Success, being less desirous to augment his Glory abroad, than to settle his Affairs at home, went back to *Spain*. The young *Alonzo* of *Ereilla*, led by an insatiable avidity of true Learning, I mean, of knowing Men, and of seeing the World; travell'd through all *France*, saw *Italy*, *Germany*, and stay'd a long while in *England*. Whilst he was in *London*, he heard some Provinces of *Peru*, and *Chily*, had taken Arms against the *Spaniards*, their Conquerors; which Struggle for their Liberty, is, by the by, stil'd Rebellion by the *Spanish* Authors. His thirst of Glory, and his eager desire of seeing, and doing new and singular things,

carry'd

carry'd him, without any hesitation or delay, into those Countries. He went to *Chily*, at the head of few Troops, and he stay'd in these parts all the time of the War.

Near the Borders of *Chily*, towards the South, lies a small mountainous Country, call'd *Araucana*, inhabited by a Race of Men, stronger, and more fierce, than all the Nations of that new World. They fought for their Liberty longer than the other *Americans*, and were the last who were subdu'd. *Alonzo* waged against them a toilsome and dangerous War, underwent inexpressible Hardships, saw and achiev'd the most surprizing Deeds, the Prize whereof was only the honour of reducing some Rocks and barren Countries, in another Hemisphere, to the Crown of *Spain*.

Alonzo, in the course of that War, conceiv'd the Idea to immortalize his Enemies and himself; he was at once the Conqueror, and the Poet. He made use of the intervals of the War to sing it; and as he wanted Paper, he wrote the first part of his Poem upon little pieces of Leather, which afterwards he had much ado to set right, and to bring together. The Poem is called the *Araucana*, from the Name of the Country.

It begins with a geographical Account of *Chily*, and with a Description of the Manners and Customs of the People. Such a beginning, which would be quite flat and intolerable in any other Poem, is necessary, and not unpleasant, in a Subject where the Scene lies under the other Tropick, and where the Heroes he writes of, are barbarous *Americans*, who must have been for ever unknown, if he had not conquer'd and celebrated them.

As the Subject was quite new, so it gave birth to new Thoughts. There is one which I present to the Readers, both as an Example of Novelty,

and

and as a Spark of the Fire which animated sometimes the Author.

“ The *Araucani*, says he, were surpriz’d at first, to see Creatures like Men, with Fire in their Hands, and dreadful Monsters fighting under them. They thought they were the immortal Gods, descending from above, with Thunder and Destruction. They submitted, though with Reluctance; but afterwards being more acquainted with their Conquerors, they saw their Vices, and judg’d they were Men: then on a sudden, asham’d of being oppress’d by their Fellow-Mortals, they swore by their Shame, to wash off their Error with the Blood of the Deceivers, and to execute a Vengeance exemplary, dreadful, and irrevocable.”

It will be useful perhaps, to take notice of a Passage in the second Book, which bears a Resemblance to the Beginning of the *Iliad*, and which being handled quite differently, deserves to be presented to the little Number of impartial Readers, that they may judge between *Homer* and *Alonzo* in that particular. The first Action of the *Araucana* is a Quarrel which happen’d between all the barbarous Chiefs, as in *Homer* between *Achilles* and *Agamemnon*. The Dispute was not about a Woman, but about the Right of commanding the Army. Every one of those savage Warriors assumes an uncontroll’d Behaviour upon the Consciousness of his own Worth, and at last the Dispute grew so high, that they were ready to fight one against another, when one of the Casiques call’d *Colotolo*, as old as *Nestor*, and less boasting of himself, than the *Grecian*, made the following Speech.

“ Casiques, ye illustrious Defenders of our Country, the vain Desire of Empire does not move me to speak to you. I do not complain that you all contend so eagerly for an Honour which per-

haps

" haps is due to my old Age, and should adorn my
 " Decline. 'Tis my Love to you, 'tis the Duty
 " that I owe to my Country, which forces me to
 " intreat you to attend to my feeble Voice. Alas!
 " How can we be so assuming; as to pretend to
 " any Grandeur whatever, and to claim honourable
 " Titles; we, who have been Subjects, nay, mi-
 " serable Slaves, to the *Spaniards*. Your Anger,
 " Cafiques, your Fury, would be better employ'd
 " against our Tyrants; why do you turn against
 " your Breasts, those Arms which might extermi-
 " nate your Enemies, and revenge our World?
 " Ah! If Death be your Desire, seek a Death that
 " is honourable! Shake off the shameful Yoke
 " with one Hand, assault the *Spaniards* with the
 " other, and shed not in an unprofitable Quarrel,
 " those last Drops of Blood of this State, which
 " the Gods have left in it for its Revenge. I am
 " not displeas'd, I confess, to see the undaunted
 " Haughtiness of your Courages. This very Fierce-
 " ness which I blame, heightens the Hopes I con-
 " ceive of our Designs; but let not your ill-go-
 " vern'd Valour prey upon itself, and destroy with
 " its own Force, the Country you rise to defend.
 " If you persist in your Quarrels, let your Swords
 " first be imbru'd in my Blood, already frozen with
 " old Age. I have liv'd too long. Happy is he who
 " dies before his Countrymen are unfortunate, and
 " unfortunate by their own Fault. Attend then
 " to what I dare propose for your Welfare. Your
 " Valour, O Cafiques, is equal; you are all equally
 " illustrious by the Honours of the War, by your
 " Birth, by your Power and Riches; your Souls are
 " noble in an equal Degree, all worthy to com-
 " mand, and able to subdue our World. Those
 " heavenly Gifts are the present Subject of your
 " great Contests, you want a Chief, and every one
 " of you is equal to that noble Charge; then since
 " there

“ there is no Difference between your Courages;
 “ let the Strength of the Body decide what the Equa-
 “ lity of your Virtues would keep undecided for
 “ ever, &c.”

Then that old Man proposes a Game, fit only for a barbarous Nation, and consequently very proper. It was to carry a ponderous Beam, and he who could sustain the Weight longest, was to be the Chief.

Now since the best Way of improving our Taste, is that of comparing together Things of the same nature, let us bring in the Discourse of *Nestor*, in Opposition to this of *Colocolo*; and laying aside that Worship, which our Minds justly prejudiced pay to the great Name of *Homer*, let the Reader weigh the two Speeches in the Ballance of Equity and Reason.

As soon as *Achilles*, warn'd and inspir'd by *Minerva*, the Goddess of Wisdom, has call'd *Agamemnon* Drunkard, Dog, and Stag, the wise *Nestor* arose to calm the ruffled Minds of those Heroes; and among other Things which I wave, to come closely to the Point of Comparison, thus he said:
 “ What a Satisfaction will it be to the *Trojans*, when
 “ they hear of your Dissensions! Young Men, you
 “ must respect my Years, and submit to my Wis-
 “ dom, I have liv'd in my Youth with Heroes, by
 “ far superior to you; no, my Eyes will never see
 “ such Men as the undaunted *Pirithous*, the bold
 “ *Ceneus*, the divine *Theseus*, &c. I went to war
 “ with them, and though younger, I sway'd their
 “ Strength by my persuasive Eloquence; they listen'd
 “ to, they obey'd *Nestor*. If in my early Years
 “ they deem'd me so wise; you, young Warriors,
 “ attend to the Advice of my old Age. *Atreides*,
 “ do not seize on the Slave of *Achilles*; you Son
 “ of *Thetis*, do not treat our Prince with Pride.
 “ *Achilles* is the greatest, the most courageous of
 “ the Warriors, *Agamemnon* is the greatest of
 “ Kings,

"Kings, &c." Thus spoke the wise *Nestor*, and his Speech prov'd entirely ineffectual, for *Agamemnon* commended his Eloquence, and neglected the Advice.

Let the Readers consider on one Part, the Endearments by which the barbarous *Colocolo* ingratiate himself into the Favour of the *Casiques*, the awful Majesty with which he checks their Animosity, the Tenderness with which he softens their Boisterousness, how the Love of his Country animates him, how the true Sense of Glory enlivens his Speech, in what a prudent Manner he praises their Valour, when he curbs their Fury; with what Art, he gives Superiority to none, and is at the same time an inoffensive Censor, and a noble Panegyrist: so that all submit to his Reason, and comply with his Advice, confessing the Force of his Eloquence, not by empty Commendations, but by a sudden Obedience.

On the other side, one may judge, if *Nestor* is so wise in talking so much of his Wisdom, if it is a good way to reconcile the Attention of the *Greek* Princes, by telling them that they are by far inferior to their Fore-fathers; if to say to *Agamemnon*, that *Achilles* is the most valorous of the present Chiefs, ought to be very acceptable to *Agamemnon*; and after having compar'd the haughty Talkativeness of *Nestor*, with the modest Eloquence of *Colocolo*; the Injury offered by one to all the *Greeks*, by the offensive Superiority ascrib'd to their Predecessors, with the engaging Praises bestow'd upon the *Casiques* then present; the odious Comparison between the Power of *Agamemnon*, and the Valour of *Achilles*; with that equal Share of Grandeur and Courage artfully extoll'd in all the *Casiques*; then let the Reader pronounce. And if there is a General in the World, who would hear his Inferior prefer'd to him in point of Courage,

if

if there is any Assembly who would bear, without Resentment, a Speaker talking to them with Contempt, and vilifying them, by extolling, at their expence, their Predecessors; let then *Homer* be preferred to *Alonzo* in that Particular.

It is true, that if *Alonzo* is above *Homer* in this Point, he is in all the rest inferior to the meanest of the Poets. It is wonderful, how he falls so low from so high a Flight. There is undoubtedly a great deal of Fire in his Battles, but no Design, no Invention, no Variety in the Descriptions, no Unity in the whole Frame; the Poem is more wild, than the Nations who are the Subject of it. In the latter End of the Work, *Alonzo*, who is one of the chief Actors in the Poem, makes a long and tedious March with some Soldiers by Night; and, to divert the time, he raises a Dispute between them about *Virgil*, and chiefly on the Episode of *Dido*. *Alonzo* takes his Opportunity, in the Conversation of relating the History of *Dido*, as it is reported by some antient Authors, and in order to give the Lye to *Virgil*, and to restore *Dido* to her former Glory, he spends two long Canto's in descanting upon her.

One of the greatest Exceptions besides, which may be taken against it, is, that the Book consists of thirty-six long Canto's. The Reader will think it probable, that a Man who does not know how to stop, is not qualified to run such a Career.

So many Defects have not deterred the celebrated *Michel Cervantes* from writing, that the *Araucana* may cope with the best Authors of Italy.

The Judgment of *Cervantes* was misled in that Point, by an overweaning Inclination toward his Countrymen. The true Love of our Country is to do good to it, to contribute to its Liberty, as far as it lies in our power; but to contend only

for the Superiority of our Authors, to boast of having among us better Poets than our Neighbours, is rather Self-love than Patriotism.

M I L T O N.

MILTON is the last in *Europe* who wrote an *Epick* Poem; for I wave all those whose Attempts have been unsuccessful, my Intention being not to descant on the many who have contended for the Prize, but to speak only of the very few who have gained it in their respective Countries.

Milton, as he was travelling through *Italy* in his Youth, saw at *Florence* a Comedy called *Adamo*, writ by one *Andreino* a Player, and dedicated to *Mary de Medicis* Queen of *France*. The Subject of the Play was the *Fall of Man*; the Actors, God, the Devils, the Angels, *Adam*, *Eve*, the Serpent, Death, and the seven mortal Sins. That Topick, so improper for a Drama, but so suitable to the absurd Genius of the *Italian* Stage, (as it was at that time) was handled in a manner entirely conformable to the Extravagance of the Design. The Scene opens with a Chorus of Angels, and a Cherubim thus speaks for the rest: "Let the Rainbow be the Fiddlestick of the Fiddle of the Heavens, let the Planets be the Notes of our Musick, let Time beat carefully the Measure, and the Winds make the Sharps, &c." Thus the Play begins, and every Scene rises above the first in Profusion of Impertinence.

Milton pierced through the Absurdity of that Performance to the hidden Majesty of the Subject, which being altogether unfit for the Stage, yet might be (for the Genius of *Milton*, and for his only) the Foundation of an *Epick* Poem.

He

He took from that ridiculous Trifle the first Hint of the noblest Work which human Imagination hath ever attempted, and which he executed more than twenty Years after.

In like manner, *Pythagoras* ow'd the Invention of Musick to the Noise of the Hammer of a Blacksmith. And thus in our days *Sir Isaac Newton* walking in his Gardens, had the first Thought of his System of Gravitation, upon seeing an Apple falling from a Tree.

If the Difference of Genius between Nation and Nation, ever appeared in its full Light, 'tis in *Milton's Paradise Lost*.

The *French* answer with a scornful Smile, when they are told there is in *England* an *Epick Poem*, the Subject whereof is the Devil fighting against God, and *Adam* and *Eve* eating an Apple at the persuasion of a Snake. As that Topick hath afforded nothing among them, but some lively Lampoons, for which that Nation is so famous; they cannot imagine it possible to build an *Epick Poem* upon the Subject of their Ballads. And indeed such an Error ought to be excused: for if we consider with what Freedom the politest Part of Mankind throughout all *Europe*, both Catholics and Protestants, are wont to ridicule in Conversation those consecrated Histories; nay, if those who have the highest Respect for the Mysteries of the Christian Religion, and who are struck with Awe at some Parts of it, yet cannot forbear now and then making free with the *Devil*, the *Serpent*, the Frailty of our first Parents, the Rib which *Adam* was robb'd of, and the like; it seems a very hard Task for a profane Poet to endeavour to remove those Shadows of Ridicule, to reconcile together what is divine, and what looks absurd, and to command a Respect that the sacred Writers could hardly obtain from our frivolous Minds.

What *Milton* so boldly undertook, he perform'd with a superior Strength of Judgment, and with an Imagination productive of Beauties not dreamt of before him. The Meanness (if there is any) of some Parts of the Subject is lost in the Immensity of the Poetical Invention. There is something above the reach of human Forces to have attempted the Creation without Bombast; to have describ'd the Gluttony and Curiosity of a Woman without Flatness; to have brought Probability and Reason amidst the hurry of imaginary Things belonging to another World, and as far remote from the Limits of our Notions as they are from our Earth; in short, to force the Reader to say, "If God, if the Angels, if Satan would speak, I believe they would speak as they do in *Milton*."

I have often admir'd how barren the Subject appears, and how fruitful it grows under his Hands.

The *Paradise Lost* is the only Poem wherein are to be found in a perfect Degree, that Uniformity which satisfies the Mind, and that Variety which pleases the Imagination: All its Episodes being necessary Lines which aim at the Centre of a perfect Circle. Where is the Nation who would not be pleas'd with the Interview of *Adam* and the *Angel*? With the Mountain of Vision, with the bold Strokes which make up the relentless, undaunted and sly Character of Satan? But above all, with that sublime Wisdom which *Milton* exerts, whenever he dares to describe God, and to make him speak? He seems indeed to draw the Picture of the Almighty, as like as human Nature can reach to, through the mortal Dust in which we are clouded.

The *Heathens* always, the *Jews* often, and our Christian Priests sometimes, represent God as a Tyrant infinitely powerful: But the God of *Milton* is always a Creator, a Father, and a Judge; nor

is his Vengeance jarring with his Mercy, nor his Predeterminations repugnant to the Liberty of Man. These are the Pictures which lift up indeed the Soul of the Reader. *Milton* in that point, as well as in many others, is as far above the ancient Poets, as the Christian Religion is above the *Heathen Fables*.

But he hath especially an undisputable Claim to the unanimous Admiration of Mankind, when he descends from those high Flights to the natural Description of human Things. It is observable, that in all other Poems, Love is represented as a Vice; in *Milton* only 'tis a Virtue. The Pictures he draws of it, are naked as the Persons he speaks of, and as venerable. He removes with a chaste Hand the Veil which covers every where else the Enjoyments of that Passion. There is Softness, Tenderness, and Warmth without Lasciviousness; the Poet transports himself and us into that State of innocent Happiness in which *Adam* and *Eve* continued for a short time: He soars not above human, but above corrupt Nature; and as there is no Instance of such Love, there is none of such Poetry.

How then it came to pass that the *Paradise Lost* had been so long neglected, (nay almost unknown) in *England*, (till the Lord *Sommers*, in some measure taught Mankind to admire it,) is a thing which I cannot reconcile, neither with the Temper, nor with the Genius of the *English* Nation.

The Duke of *Buckingham*, in his Art of Poetry, gives the Preference to *Spencer*. It is reported in the Life of the Lord *Rochester*, that he had no notion of a better Poet than *Cowley*.

Mr. *Dryden's* Judgment on *Milton* is still more unaccountable. He hath bestow'd some Verses upon

upon him, in which he puts him upon a level with;
nay above *Virgil* and *Homer*;

*The Force of Nature could no further go;
To make a third, she join'd the former two.*

The same Mr. *Dryden* in his Preface upon his Translation of the *Æneid*, ranks *Milton* with *Chaplain* and *Le Moine*, the most impertinent Poets who ever scribbled. How he could extol him so much in his Verses, and debase him so low in his Prose, is a Riddle, which being a Foreigner, I cannot understand.

In short, one would be apt to think that *Milton* had not obtained his true Reputation, till Mr. *Addison*, the best Critick as well as the best Writer of his Age, pointed out the most hidden Beauties of the *Paradise Lost*, and settled for ever its Reputation.

It is an easy and a pleasant Task, to take notice of the many Beauties of *Milton*, which I call universal: But 'tis a ticklish Undertaking to point out what would be reputed a Fault in any other Country.

I am very far from thinking, that one Nation ought to judge of its Productions by the Standard of another; nor do I presume, that the *French* (for Example) who have no *Epick* Poets, have any right to give Laws on *Epick* Poetry.

But I fancy many *English* Readers, who are acquainted with the *French* Language, will not be displeas'd to have some notion of the Taste of that Country: And I hope they are too just either to submit to it, or despise it, barely upon the score of its being foreign to them.

Would each Nation attend a little more than they do, to the Taste and the Manners of their respective Neighbours; perhaps a general good Taste might

might diffuse itself through all *Europe* from such an Intercourse of Learning, and from that useful Exchange of Observations. The *English* Stage, for example, might be clear'd of mangled Carcasses, and the Style of their tragick Authors, come down from their forced Metaphorical Bombast to a nearer Imitation of Nature. The *French* would learn from the *English* to animate their Tragedies with more Action, and would contract now and then their long Speeches into shorter and warmer Sentiments.

The *Spaniards* would introduce in their Plays more Pictures of human Life, more Characters and Manners, and not puzzle themselves always in the Entanglements of confus'd Adventures, more romantick than natural. The *Italian*, in point of Tragedy, would catch the Flame from the *English*, and all the rest from the *French*. In point of Comedy, they would learn from Mr. *Congreve*, and some other Authors, to prefer Wit and Humour to Buffoonery.

To proceed in that View, I'll venture to say, that none of the *French* Criticks could like the Excursions which *Milton* makes sometimes beyond the strict Limits of his Subject. They lay down for a Rule, that an Author himself ought never to appear in his Poem; and his own Thoughts, his own Sentiments, must be spoken by the Actors he introduces. Many judicious Men in *England* comply with that Opinion; and Mr. *Addison* favours it. I beg leave, in this place, to hazard a Reflection of my own, which I submit to the Reader's Judgment.

Milton breaks the Thread of his Narration in two Manners. The first consists of two or three kinds of Prologues, which he premises at the Beginning of some Books. In one Place, he expatiates upon his own Blindness; in another he compares

compares his Subject, and prefers it to that of the *Iliad*, and to the common Topicks of War, which were thought before him the only Subject fit for *Epick* Poetry; and he adds, that he hopes to soar as high as all his Predecessors, unless the cold Climate of *England damps his Wings*.

His other way of interrupting his Narration, is, by some Observations which he intersperses now and then upon some great Incident, or some interesting Circumstance. Of that kind is his Digression on Love in the fourth Book;

*Whatever Hypocrites austere talk
Defaming as impure, what God declares
Pure, and commands to some, leaves free to all;
Our Maker bids increase, who bids abstain,
But our Destroyer, Foe to God and Men?
Hail wedded Love, &c.*

As to the first of these two Heads, I cannot but own that an Author is generally guilty of an unpardonable Self-love, when he lays aside his Subject to descant on his own Person: But that human Frailty is to be forgiven in *Milton*; nay, I am pleas'd with it. He gratifies the Curiosity it raises in me about his Person; when I admire the Author, I desire to know something of the Man: and he whom all Readers would be glad to know, is allow'd to speak of himself. But this, however, is a very dangerous Example for a Genius of an inferior Order, and is only to be justified by Success.

As to the second Point, I am so far from looking on that Liberty as a Fault, that I think it to be a great Beauty. For if Morality is the Aim of Poetry, I do not apprehend why the Poet should be forbidden to intersperse his Descriptions with moral Sentences and useful Reflections, provided he

he scatters them with a sparing Hand, and in proper Places, either when he wants Personages to utter those Thoughts, or when their Character does not permit them to speak in the behalf of Virtue.

'Tis strange, that *Homer* is commended by the Criticks for his comparing *Ajax* to an *Ass*, pelted away with Stones by some Children; *Ulysses* to a Pudding; the Council-board of *Priam* to Grasshoppers: 'Tis strange, I say, that they defend so clamorously those Similies, tho' ever so foreign to the Purpose, and will not allow the natural Reflections, the noble Digressions of *Milton*, tho' ever so closely link'd to the Subject.

I will not dwell upon some small Errors of *Milton*, which are obvious to every Reader; I mean some few Contradictions, and those frequent Glances at the *Heathen* Mythology; which Fault, by the by, is so much the more inexcusable in him, by his having premis'd in his first Book, that those Divinities were but Devils worshipp'd under different Names, which ought to have been a sufficient Caution to him not to speak of the Rape of *Proserpine*, of the Wedding of *Juno* and *Jupiter*, &c. as Matters of Fact.

I lay aside likewise his preposterous and awkward Jest, his Puns, his too familiar Expressions, so inconsistent with the Elevation of his Genius, and of his Subject.

To come to more essential Points, and more liable to be debated: I dare affirm, that the Contrivance of the *Pandæmonium* would have been entirely disapprov'd of by Criticks like *Boileau*, *Racine*, &c.

That Seat built for the Parliament of the Devils, seems very preposterous; since Satan hath summon'd them all together, and harangu'd them just before in an ample Field. The Council was

necessary;

necessary; but where it was to be held, 'twas very indifferent. The Poet seems to delight in building his *Pandæmonium* in *Doric* Order, with Freeze and Cornice, and a Roof of Gold. Such a Contrivance favours more of the wild Fancy of our Father *Le Moine*, than of the serious Spirit of *Milton*.

But when afterwards the Devils turn Dwarfs to fill their Places in the House, as if it was impracticable to build a Room large enough to contain them in their natural Size; it is an idle Story, which would match the most extravagant Tales. And to crown all, Satan and the chief Lords preserving their own monstrous Forms, while the Rabble of the Devils shrink into Pigmies, heightens the Ridicule of the whole Contrivance to an inexpressible degree. Methinks the true Criterion for discerning what is really ridiculous in an *Epick* Poem, is, to examine if the same thing would not fit exactly the Mock-Heroick. Then I dare say that nothing is so adapted to that ludicrous way of Writing, as the Metamorphosis of the Devils into Dwarfs.

The Fiction of *Death* and *Sin* seems to have in it some great Beauties and many gross Defects. In order to canvass this matter with order, we must first lay down, that such shadowy Beings, as *Death*, *Sin*, *Chaos*, are intolerable when they are not allegorical: For Fiction is nothing but Truth in disguise. It must be granted too, that an Allegory must be short, decent, and noble. For an Allegory carried too far or too low, is like a beautiful Woman who wears always a Mask. An Allegory is a long Metaphor; and to speak too long in Metaphors, must be tiresome, because unnatural. This being premis'd, I must say, that in general those Fictions, those imaginary Beings, are more agreeable to the Nature of *Milton's* Poem, than to any other; because he hath but two natural Persons for his Actors, I mean *Adam* and *Eve*.

A great part of the Action lies in imaginary Worlds, and must of course admit of imaginary Beings.

Then *Sin* springing out of the Head of Satan, seems a beautiful Allegory of Pride, which is look'd upon as the first Offence committed against God. But I question if *Satan*, getting his Daughter with Child, is an Invention to be approv'd of. I am afraid that Fiction is but a mere Quibble; for if Sin was of a masculine Gender in *English*, as it is in all the other Languages, that whole Affair drops, and the Fiction vanishes away. But suppose we are not so nice, and we allow *Satan* to be in love with *Sin*, because this Word is made feminine in English (as Death passes also for masculine) what a horrid and loathsome Idea does *Milton* present to the Mind, in this Fiction? *Sin* brings forth *Death*; this Monster inflam'd with Lust and Rage, lies with his Mother, as she had done with her Father. From that new Commerce, springs a Swarm of Serpents, which creep in and out of their Mother's Womb, and gnaw and tear the Bowels they are born from.

Let such a Picture be ever so beautifully drawn, let the Allegory be ever so obvious, and so clear, still it will be intolerable, on the account of its Foulness. That Complication of Horrors, that Mixture of Incest, that Heap of Monsters, that Loathsomeness so far fetch'd, cannot but shock a Reader of delicate Taste.

But what is more intolerable, there are Parts in that Fiction, which bearing no Allegory at all, have no manner of Excuse. There is no meaning in the Communication between Death and Sin, 'tis distasteful without any purpose; or if any Allegory lies under it, the filthy Abomination of the thing is certainly more obvious than the Allegory.

I see with Admiration, *Sin*, the Portress of Hell, opening the Gates of the Abyfs, but unable to shut them

them again: that is really beautiful, because 'tis true. But what signifies Satan and Death quarrelling together, grinning at one another, and ready to fight?

The Fiction of *Chaos*, *Night*, and *Discord*, is rather a Picture, than an Allegory; and for aught I know, deserves to be approv'd, because it strikes the Reader with Awe, not with Horror.

I know the Bridge built by Death and Sin, would be dislik'd in *France*. The nice Criticks of that Country would urge against that Fiction, that it seems too common, and that it is useless; for Men's Souls want no paved Way, to be thrown into Hell, after their Separation from the Body.

They would laugh justly at the Paradise of Fools, at the Hermits, Friars, Couls, Beads, Indulgences, Bulls, Reliques tofs'd by the Winds, at St. Peter's waiting with his Keys at the Wicket of Heaven: And surely the most passionate Admirers of *Milton*, could not vindicate those low comical Imaginations, which belong by right to *Ariosto*.

Now the sublimest of all the Fictions calls me to examine it. I mean the War in Heaven. The Earl of *Roscommon*, and Mr. *Addison* (whose Judgment seems either to guide, or to justify the Opinion of his Countrymen) admire chiefly that Part of the Poem. They bestow all the Skill of their Criticism, and the Strength of their Eloquence, to set off that favourite Part. I may affirm, that the very Things they admire, would not be tolerated by the *French* Criticks. The Reader will perhaps see with pleasure, in what consists so strange a Difference, and what may be the ground of it.

First, they would assert, that a War in Heaven being an imaginary Thing, which lies out of the reach of our Nature, should be contracted in two or three Pages, rather than lengthen'd out into two Books; because we are naturally impatient of removing from us the Objects which are not adapted to our Senses.

According

According to that Rule, they would maintain that 'tis an idle Task to give the Reader the full Character of the Leaders of that War, and to describe *Raphael, Michael, Abdiel, Moloch, and Nisroth*; as *Homer* paints *Ajax, Diomedes, and Hector*.

For what avails it to draw at length the Picture of these Beings, so utterly Strangers to the Reader, that he cannot be affected any way towards them; by the same Reason, the long Speeches of these imaginary Warriors, either before the Battle, or in the middle of the Action, their mutual Insults, seem an injudicious Imitation of *Homer*.

The aforesaid Criticks would not bear with the Angels plucking up the Mountains, with their Woods, their Waters, and their Rocks, and flinging them on the Heads of their Enemies. Such a Contrivance (they would say) is the more puerile, the more it aims at Greatness. Angels arm'd with Mountains in Heaven, resemble too much the Dipsodes in *Rabelais*, who wore an Armour of *Portland Stone* six Foot thick.

The Artillery seems of the same kind, yet more trifling, because more useless.

To what purpose are these Engines brought in? since they cannot wound the Enemies, but only remove them from their places, and make them tumble down. Indeed (if the Expression may be forgiven) 'tis to play at Nine-pins. And the very thing which is so dreadfully great on Earth, becomes very low and ridiculous in Heaven.

I cannot omit here, the visible Contradiction which reigns in that Episode. God sends his faithful Angels to fight, to conquer, and to punish the Rebels. Go (says he, to *Michael and Gabriel*)

— And to the Brow of Heaven
Pursuing, drive them out from God and Bliss,
Into their place of punishment, the Gulph

G

of

Of Tartarus, which ready opens wide
His fiery Chaos to receive their Fall.

How does it come to pass, after such a positive Order, that the Battle hangs doubtful? And why did God the Father command *Gabriel* and *Raphael*, to do what he executes afterwards by his Son only.

I leave it to the Readers, to pronounce if these Observations are right, or ill-grounded, and if they are carried too far. But in case these Exceptions are just, the severest Critick must however confess there are Perfections enough in *Milton*, to atone for all his Defects.

I must beg leave to conclude this Article on *Milton*, with two Observations.

His Hero (I mean *Adam*, his first Personage) is unhappy. That demonstrates against all the Criticks, that a very good Poem may end unfortunately, in spite of all their pretended Rules. Secondly, The *Paradise Lost* ends compleatly. The Thread of the Fable is spun out to the last. *Milton* and *Tasso* have been careful of not stopping short and abruptly. The one does not abandon *Adam* and *Eve*, till they are driven out of *Eden*. The other does not conclude, before *Jerusalem* is taken. *Homer* and *Virgil* took a contrary way; the *Iliad* ends with the Death of *Hector*, the *Æneid* with that of *Turnus*. The Tribe of Commentators have upon that enacted a Law, That a House ought never to be finished, because *Homer* and *Virgil* did not compleat their own; but if *Homer* had taken *Troy*, and *Virgil* married *Lavinia* to *Æneas*, the Criticks would have laid down a Rule just the contrary.

Was I sway'd by the common Affectation of commending our native Country abroad, I would endeavour in this place, to set off to the best advantage, some of our *Epick* Poems; but I must frankly

frankly own, among more than fifty which I have read, there is not one tolerable. Then, instead of throwing away an unavailable Criticism upon some wretched *French* Poem, I am reduced to inquire why we have not a good one; for it seems a little strange, that a Nation who boasts of having succeeded so well in all the other Parts of Poetry, falls so short of herself in that particular.

I have heard the *French* Tongue arraigned in *England* of Insufficiency, as being neither strong nor lofty enough to reach the Sublimity of *Epick* Poetry.

I am apt to think, that every Language has its own particular Genius, flowing chiefly from the Genius of the Nation, and partly from its own Nature.

On the one side, more or less Liberty in the Government, and in Religion, a more or less free Conversation between the two Sexes, the Influence of the first Authors, who have written with Success, and whose Style is become the general Standard; all these Means have great share in determining the Nature of a Language, in making it extensive or stinted, strong or weak, sublime or low.

On the other side, the Roughness of too many Consonants, the Softness of predominant Vowels, the Length or the Shortness of the Words, more or less Articles, and the like, give a strong bias to an Idiom, and render it more or less susceptible of some particular Ways of Writing.

Thus if we consider the softness and effeminacy into which the luxuriancy of Vowels emasculates the *Italian* Tongue, and the idleness in which the *Italians* spend all their Life, busy only in the pursuit of those Arts which soften the Mind; we must not wonder if that Language passes (as it were) for the Language of Love.

The freedom of Society in *France*, and the turn of the Phrases, which, as they admit of no Trans-

position,

position, are the more perspicuous, qualify exceedingly the *French* Tongue for Conversation. The former Roughness of the *English* Language, now improv'd into strength and energy, its copiousness, its admitting of many inversions, fit it for more sublime Performances. Besides, the force of that Idiom is wonderfully heighten'd by the nature of the Government, which allows the *English* to speak in publick; and by the Liberty of Conscience, which makes them more conversant in the Scripture, and hath rendered the Language of the Prophets so familiar to them, that their Poetry favours very much of that *Eastern* out-of-the-way Sublimity; nay, sixty, or eighty Years ago, all the Speeches in Parliament were cramm'd with Expressions taken from the *Jewish* Writings. But such predominant Qualifications of a Language, do not imply an exclusion of any other Aptitude in it. Lofty Performances have been made in *Italian*. Some *English* Poets have written gracefully upon Love, and it is not impossible for the *French* to have an *Epick* Poem.

The *French* Tongue has strength and majesty enough in *Corneille's* Tragedies. Nay, now and then it soars up in his Plays, beyond the true Measure of Sublime. Far from wanting Force or Grandeur, it labours under a contrary Defect: And this is a Secret which I unfold willingly. We can hardly express common things with felicity in our Heroick Poetry. The Genius of the Nation, and consequently the Turn of the Language, does not allow us to come down to the Description of the Trappings of a Horse, of the Wheels of a Chariot, &c. We can commend rural Life in general, but not specify, with dignity, the little Particularities belonging to it. This Task is avoided by all our skilful Writers, who are conscious of the Defectiveness of the Language in that respect. In short, such

such is our Disadvantage, that there is an infinite number of Things, which we dare neither call by their Names, nor express by a Periphrase. Mr. Pope, in his Translation of *Homer*, may, without any Risque, wound a Hero, *where the Bone and the Bladder meet*, or pierce him through the *right Shoulder*. He may say after his Original:

*The Dart——pierced a vital part,
Full in his Face it entered, and betwixt
The Nose, and the Eye-ball, the proud Lician fix'd,
Crash'd all his Jaws, and cleft the Tongue within,
Till the bright Point look'd out beneath the Chin.*

The like Attempt in *French* would be thought Burlesque. The Fields of Nature lie wide and open for the *English* to range through at pleasure, whilst we are stinted, and obliged to walk with too much Circumspection.

To this happy Freedom that the *British* Nation enjoys in every thing, are owing many excellent poetical Versions of the ancient Poets; whereas the *French* are reduced to translate *Virgil*, *Homer*, *Lucretius*, and *Ovid*, in Prose.

Mr. de la Motte, a Member of the *French* Academy, is the only Man of some Reputation, who attempted the *Iliad* in Verse; but he was forced to contract the four and twenty Books of *Homer* into twelve; yet those twelve do not contain so many Verses as four Books of *Homer* do. His *Iliad* is a short Abridgment of the *Greek*, and yet is judg'd to be exceedingly too long.

After all, if that slavery, if that coyness of the *French* Language, makes it unfit for translating *Homer*, and *Virgil*; yet I do not perceive how that should hinder the Nation from having an *Epick Poem* of her own growth?

A Poem, methinks, might subsist very well without the help of mechanick, or anatomical Descriptions.

tions. We rather require of an Author to excite our Passions, to unfold the most intricate Recesses of the Soul, to describe the Customs of the Nations, to mark the Differences which arise in the Characters of Men, from the different Governments they are born under ; in short, to speak the Language of the polite World ; than to play the Surgeon, the Carpenter, or the Joiner, tho' ever so elegantly.

Cardinal of *Rets*, and the Earl of *Clarendon*, in their Memoirs, unravel all the Springs of the Civil Wars, and draw, at full length, the Pictures of those whose Ambition shook the Foundation of their respective Countries. But neither of these two great Writers, makes it his particular care to describe with accuracy, how such a Colonel was wounded through the Bladder, and such a Captain in the Kidneys. Nor do they throw away their Time in describing elegantly of what Wood the Benches of the House of Parliament were made. Why then should an *Epick* Poet lie under the necessity of elaborating those little Descriptions, which every noble Historian avoids with care?

Some impute our want of an *Epick* Poem, to the Shackles of Rhime. They say, that the jingling return of the same Sounds, which are chiming on, in the same Stops, Measures, Pauses, without any variety, or any relief to the Ear, must needs occasion an insupportable Uniformity throughout all the Work. They urge, that Slavery cramps the noblest Genius ; and a Poet, instead of using Rhime, as an Ornament serviceable to his Sense, makes his own Thoughts subservient to Rhime.

They add, *Rhime* is a barbarous *Gothick* Invention, owing to the dull Sprightliness of the Monks ; and contend, that nothing Good can be built with so bad a Material.

First, I must confess we are Slaves to Rhime in *France*, and our Slavery is altogether irretrievable.

Nay,

Nay, all our Tragedies ought to be rhimed. For our Poetry being fetter'd by too strict Rules, admitting of no Inversions, nor of Verses inroaching upon one another, would have nothing but Loftiness of Style to distinguish it from Prose, if it were not for Rhime. We have no manner of Pretence to Blank Verse, we must keep to Rhime necessarily; and whosoever would attempt to throw off a Burthen which Mr. *Boileau*, *Racine*, and *Cornelle*, have so gloriously sustained, would be thought rather weak than bold, and certainly would meet with a very unkind Reception.

As to that pretended uniformity and tediousness objected against Verses in Rhime, it is not to be found in Authors truly good, of whatsoever Country. *Tasso* is read with pleasure, tho' all his Verses, nay, almost all his Syllables, end in *a, e, i, o*. And those who say Rhime is an Invention of the Monks of the seventh Century, are utterly in the wrong. All the Nations whose Languages are known to us, have Verses in Rhime, except the *Greeks*, and the *Romans*.

The return of the same Sounds is a kind of natural Musick, more obvious to the Ear, and more easily reduc'd into an Art, than the *Quantity* of Syllables. It is true, that Distinction between long and short Syllables, afforded to the *Romans* and *Greeks* an harmonious variety of Sounds, which by their Quickness, or Gravity, were wonderfully expressive of the impetuous, or slow Motions of the Soul. But we ought not (because we want so great an Advantage) to neglect the only one we are in possession of, and in room of which, we have nothing to set up. Shou'd we not manure our own Soil, because some others are more fruitful?

After these little Hints upon our Language, and our Versification, I will own, that an *Epick* Poem is a harder Task in *France*, than in any other Country whatever; not purely because we *Rhime*, but because

because our Rhimes, as well as the other Parts of our Versification, are ty'd down to most insupportable and insignificant Rules; not because our Language wants Loftiness, but because it wants Freedom. For it is with our Heroick Poetry, as with our Trade, we come up to the *English* in neither, for want of being a free Nation.

Slavery is generally an Obstacle to Abundance. Our coy Language is not as copious as it should be. We have discarded a multitude of old energetic Expressions, the loss of which has weakened the Stock of the *French* Tongue, as the compelling our Protestants away hath thinned the Nation. The *English* have naturalized many of our antiquated Words, as they have done our Countrymen; and so they have increased their Language, as well as their People, at our Expence.

But the greatest Enemy to *Epick* Poetry in *France*, is the Turn of the Genius of our Nation. It is almost impossible for us to venture on any Machinery. The antient Gods are exploded out of the World. The present Religion cannot succeed them among us. The Cherub, and the Seraph, which act so noble a Part in *Milton*, would find it very hard to work their way into a *French* Poem. The very Words of *Gabriel*, *Michael*, *Raphael*, would run a great hazard of being made a Jest of. Our Saints, who make so good a Figure in our Churches, make a very sorry one in our *Epick* Poems. *St. Denis*, *St. Christopher*, *St. Roke*, and *St. Genevieve*, ought to appear in Print no where, but in our Prayer-Books, and in the History of the Saints; a noble Volume, which contains more Wonders than any Machinery could afford.

To conclude: The best Reason I can offer for our ill Success in *Epick* Poetry, is the Insufficiency of all who have attempted it. I can add nothing further, after this ingenuous Confession.

